

# KEEPING THE HEART



BY  
JOHN FLAVEL.

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"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

The heart of man is his *worst* part before it is regenerated—and the *best* afterward. It is the seat of principles, and the fountain of actions. The eye of God is fixed upon it—and the eye of the Christian ought to be principally fixed upon it.

The greatest difficulty *in* conversion—is to *win* the heart to God. The greatest difficulty *after* conversion—is to *keep* the heart with God. Here lies the very force and stress of religion; here is that which makes the way to life a *narrow way*, and the gate of heaven a *strait gate*. Direction and help in this great work, are the scope of the text: wherein we have,

## An EXHORTATION, "Keep your heart

with all diligence." In the exhortation I shall consider,

First, The *matter* of the duty.

Secondly, The *manner* of performing it.

**The MATTER of the duty.** Keep your heart. By heart, in a metaphor, the Scripture sometimes represents some particular noble faculty of the soul. In Rom. 1:21, it is put for the *understanding*; their foolish heart, that is, their foolish understanding was darkened. Psalm 119:11, it is put for the *memory*; "Your word have I hid in my heart:" and 1 John 3:10, it is put for the *conscience*, which includes both the light of the understanding and the recognitions of the memory; if our heart condemns us, that is, if our conscience, whose proper office it is to condemn.

But in the text we are to take it more generally, for *the whole soul*, or *inner man*. What the heart is to the body—that the soul is to the man. What health is to the heart—that holiness is to the soul. The state of the whole body depends upon the soundness and vigor of the heart—and the everlasting state of the whole man upon the good or ill condition of the soul.

**By keeping the heart, we mean the diligent and constant use of all holy means to preserve the soul from sin, and maintaining its sweet and free communion with God.** I say constant, for the reason added in the text extends the duty to all the states and conditions of a Christian's life, and makes it binding always. If the heart must be kept, because out of it are the issues of life, then as long as these issues of life do flow out of it, we are obliged to keep it.

Lavater on the text will have the word taken from a besieged garrison, beset by many enemies without, and in danger of being betrayed by treacherous citizens within, in which danger the soldiers, upon pain of death, are commanded to watch; and though the expression, Keep your heart, seems to put it upon us as *our* work, yet it does not imply a sufficiency in us to do it. *We are as able to stop the sun in its course, or to make the rivers run backward—as by our own will and power to rule and order our hearts.* We may as well be our own *saviors* as our own *keepers*; and yet Solomon speaks properly enough when he says, "Keep your heart," because the *duty* is ours, though the *power* is of God; what power we have depends upon the

exciting and assisting strength of Christ. Grace *within* us is beholden to grace *outside* us. "Without me you can do nothing." So much for the matter of the duty.

**The MANNER of performing it, is with all diligence.** The Hebrew is very emphatic; keep with all keeping, or, "keep, keep"—set double guards. This vehemence of expression with which the duty is urged, plainly implies how *difficult* it is to keep our hearts, how *dangerous* to neglect them!

**The MOTIVE to this duty** is very forcible and weighty: "For out of the heart are the issues of life." That is, the heart is the source of all vital operations; it is the spring and original of both good and evil, as the spring in a watch that sets all the wheels in motion. The heart is the treasury, the hand and tongue but the shops; what is in these, comes from that; the hand and tongue always begin where the heart ends. The heart contrives, and the members execute: "a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, brings forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." So then, if the heart errors in its work, these must miscarry in theirs; for heart errors are like the errors of the first concoction, which cannot be rectified afterward; or like the misplacing and inverting of the stamps and letters in the press, which must cause so many errata in all the copies that are printed. O then how important a duty is that which is contained in the following.

PROPOSITION— **The keeping and right managing of the heart in every condition, is one great business of a Christian's life.**

What the philosopher says of waters, is as properly applicable to hearts; it is hard to keep them within any bounds. God has set limits to our hearts, yet how frequently do they transgress not only the bounds of grace and religion, but even of reason and common honesty? This is that which affords the Christian matter of labor and watchfulness, to his dying day. It is not the cleaning of the hand that makes the Christian, for many a hypocrite can show as fair a hand as he; but the purifying watching, and right ordering of the heart! This is the thing that provokes so many sad complaints and costs so many deep groans and tears. It was the pride of Hezekiah's heart that made him lie in the dust, mourning before the Lord. It was the fear of hypocrisy's invading the heart that made David cry, "Let my heart be sound in your statutes, that I be not ashamed." It was the sad experience he had of the divisions and distractions of his own heart in the service of God, that made him pour out the prayer, "Unite my heart to fear your name."

The method in which I propose to improve the proposition is this:

First, I shall inquire **what** the keeping of the heart supposes and imports.

Secondly, Assign diverse reasons **why** Christians must make this a leading business of their lives.

Thirdly, Point out those **seasons** which especially call for this diligence in keeping the heart.

Fourthly, **Apply** the whole.

# WHAT is keeping the heart?

To keep the heart, necessarily supposes a previous work of regeneration, which has set the heart right, by giving it a new spiritual inclination, for as long as the heart it not *set* right by grace as to in habitual frame, no means can *keep* it right with God. *Self is the spring of the unrenewed heart*, which biases and moves it in all its designs and actions; and as long as it is so, it is impossible that any external means should keep it with God.

Man, **originally**, was of one constant, uniform frame of spirit, and held one straight and even course. Not one thought or faculty was disordered: his *mind* had a perfect knowledge of the requirements of God, his *will* a perfect compliance therewith; all his *appetites* and powers stood in a most obedient subordination.

Man, by the **apostasy**, has become a most disordered and rebellious creature, opposing his Maker, as the First Cause—by self-dependence; as the Chief Good—by self-love; as the Highest Lord—by self-will; and as the Last End—by self-seeking. Thus he is quite disordered, and all his actions are irregular.

But by regeneration the disordered soul is set right; this great change being, as the Scripture expresses it, the renovation of the soul after the image of God—in which self-dependence is removed by faith; self-love is removed by the love of God; self-will is removed by subjection and obedience to the will of God; and self-seeking is removed by self-denial. The darkened *understanding* is illuminated, the refractory *will* sweetly subdued, the rebellious *appetite* gradually conquered. Thus the soul which sin had universally depraved, is by grace restored.

This being pre-supposed, it will not be difficult to apprehend what it is to keep the heart, which is nothing but **the constant care and diligence of such a renewed man to preserve his soul in that holy frame to which grace has raised it**. For though grace has, in a great measure, rectified the soul, and given it a habitual heavenly temper; yet sin often actually discomposes it again; so that even a gracious heart is like a musical instrument, which though it is exactly tuned, a small matter brings it out of tune again. Yes, put it aside but a little while—and it will need setting again before another lesson can be played upon it. If gracious hearts are in a desirable frame in one duty, yet how dull, dead, and disordered when they come to another duty! Therefore every duty needs a particular preparation of the heart. "If you prepare your heart and stretch out your hands toward him," etc. **To keep the heart then, is carefully to preserve it from sin, which disorders it; and maintain that spiritual frame which fits it for a life of communion with God**. This includes in it six particulars:

**1. Frequent observation of the frame of the heart.** Carnal and formal persons take no heed to this; they cannot be brought to confer with their own hearts: there are some people who have lived forty or fifty years in the world, and have had scarcely one hour's discourse with their own hearts. It is a hard thing to bring a man and himself together on such business; but saints know those soliloquies to be very beneficial. The heathen could say, "the soul is made wise by sitting still in

quietness." Though *bankrupts* care not to look into their accounts, yet upright hearts will know whether they go backward or forward. "I commune with my own heart," says David. The heart can never be kept—until its case be examined and understood.

**2. It includes deep humiliation for heart evils and disorders.** Thus Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart. Thus the people were ordered to spread forth their hands to God in prayer, realizing the plague of their own hearts. Upon this account many an upright heart has been laid low before God—'O what an heart have I!' Saints have in their confession pointed at the heart—the pained place, 'Lord, here is the wound!' It is with the heart well kept, as it is with the eye; if a small dust gets into the eye it will never cease blinking and watering until it has wept it out. Just so, the upright heart cannot be at rest until it has wept out its troubles and poured out its complaints before the Lord.

**3. It includes earnest supplication and instant prayer for purifying and rectifying grace, when sin has defiled and disordered the heart.** "Cleanse me from secret faults" "Unite my heart to fear your name." Saints have always many such petitions before the throne of God's grace; this is the thing which is most pleaded by them with God. When they are praying for outward mercies, perhaps their spirits may be more remiss; but when it comes to the heart's case, they extend their spirits to the utmost, fill their mouths with arguments, weep and make supplication: 'O for a better heart! O for a heart to love God more; to hate sin more; to walk more evenly with God. Lord! Do not deny me such a heart; whatever you deny me! Give me a heart to fear you, to love and delight in you!' It is observed of an eminent saint, that when he was confessing sin, he would never give over confessing until he had felt some brokenness of heart for that sin; and when praying for any spiritual mercy, would never give over that suit until he had obtained some relish of that mercy.

**4. It includes the imposing of strong engagement upon ourselves to walk more carefully with God, and avoid the occasions whereby the heart may be induced to sin.** Well advised and deliberate vows are, in some cases, very useful to guard the heart against some special sin. "I have made a covenant with my eyes," says Job. By this means holy men have overawed their souls, and preserved themselves from defilement.

**5. It includes a constant and holy jealousy over our onto hearts.** Quick-sighted self-jealousy is an excellent preservative from sin. He who will keep his heart, must have the eyes of the soul awake and open upon all the disorderly and tumultuous stirrings of his affections. If the affections break loose, and the passions are stirred, the soul must discover it, and suppress them before they get to a height. 'O my soul, do you do well in this? My tumultuous thoughts and passions, where is your commission?' Happy is the man that thus fears always. By this fear of the Lord, it is that men depart from evil, shake off sloth, and preserve themselves from iniquity. He who will keep his heart must eat and drink with fear, rejoice with fear, and pass the whole time of his sojourning here in holy fear. All this is little enough to keep the heart from sin.

**6. It includes the realizing of God's presence with us, and setting the Lord always before us.** This the people have found a powerful means of keeping their hearts upright, and awing them from sin. When the eye of our faith is fixed upon the eye of God's omniscience, we dare not let out our thoughts and affections to vanity. Holy Job dare not allow his heart to yield to an impure, vain thought, and what was it that moved him to so great circumspection? He tells us, "Does not He see my ways, and count all my steps?"

In such particulars as these do gracious souls express the care they have of their hearts. They are careful to prevent the breaking loose of the corruptions in time of temptation; careful to preserve the sweetness and comfort they have gotten from God in any duty. This is the work, and of all works in religion it is the most *difficult*, *constant*, and *important* work.

1. It is the **HARDEST** work. Heart-work is hard work indeed. To shuffle over religious duties with a loose and heedless spirit—will cost no great pains; but to set yourself before the Lord, and tie up your loose and vain thoughts to a constant and serious attendance upon him; this will cost you something. To attain a facility and dexterity of language in prayer, and put your meaning into apt and decent expressions, is easy; but to get your heart broken for sin, while you are confessing it; melted with free grace while you are blessing God for it; to be really ashamed and humbled though the apprehensions of God's infinite holiness, and to keep your heart in this frame, not only in, but after duty—will surely cost you some groans and pains of soul. To repress the outward acts of sin, and compose the external part of your life in a laudable manner—is no great matter; even carnal people, by the force of common principles, can do this. But to kill the root of corruption within, to set and keep up a holy government over your thought, to have all things lie straight and orderly in the heart—this is not easy.

2. It is a **CONSTANT** work. The keeping of the heart is a work that is never done until life is ended. There is no time or condition in the life of a Christian which will allow an intermission of this work. It is in keeping watch over our hearts, as it was in keeping up Moses' hands while Israel and Amalek were fighting. No sooner do the hands of Moses grow heavy and sink down, than Amalek prevails. Pausing the watch over their own hearts for but a few minutes, cost David and Peter many a sad day and night.

3. It is the most **IMPORTANT** business of a Christian's life. Without this we are but formalists in religion: all our professions, gifts and duties signify nothing. "My son, *give* me your heart!" is God's request. God is pleased to call that a *gift* which is indeed a *debt*; he will put this honor upon the creature, to receive it from him in the way of a gift; but if this be not given him, he regards not whatever else you bring to him. There is only so much of worth in what we do for God—as there is of heart in it. Concerning the heart, God seems to say, as Joseph of Benjamin, "If you bring not Benjamin with you, you shall not see my face." Among the Heathen, when the beast was cut up for sacrifice, the first thing the priest looked upon was the heart; and if that was unsound and worthless the sacrifice was rejected. God rejects all duties (however glorious in other respects) which are offered him without the heart. He who performs duty without the heart, that is, heedlessly—is no more accepted with God than he who performs it with a double heart, that is, hypocritically.

Thus I have briefly considered **WHAT** the keeping of the heart supposes and imports. I proceed,

Secondly, To assign some reasons **WHY** Christians must make this the great business of their lives.

# WHY should we keep the heart?

The importance and necessity of making this our great business will manifestly appear from several considerations:

**1. The glory of God is much concerned.** Heart-evils are very provoking evils to the Lord. Outward sins are "sins of great infamy," but that the heart-sins are "sins of deeper guilt." How severely has the great God declared his wrath from heaven against heart-wickedness!

The crime for which the *old world* stands indicted is heart-wickedness! "God saw that every imagination of their *hearts* was only evil, and that continually;" for which he sent the most dreadful judgments that were ever inflicted since time began. We find not their murders, adulteries, blasphemies, (though they were defiled with these) particularly alleged against them—but the evils of their *hearts*!

That by which God was so provoked as to give up *his special inheritance* into the enemy's hand, was the evil of their hearts. "O Jerusalem, wash your *heart* from wickedness, that you may be saved; how long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?" Of the wickedness and vanity of their thoughts, God took particular notice; and because of this the Chaldeans must come upon them, "as a lion from his thicket, and tear them to pieces."

For the sin of thoughts it was that God threw down the *fallen angels* from heaven, and still keeps them in "everlasting chains" to the judgment of the great day; by which expression is not obscurely intimated some extraordinary judgment to which they are reserved; as prisoners that have most irons laid upon them may be supposed to be the greatest malefactors. And what was their sin? Spiritual wickedness! Merely heart-evils are so provoking to God, that for them he rejects with indignation all the duties that some men perform. "Their offerings will not be accepted. When such people sacrifice an ox, it is no more acceptable than a human sacrifice. When they sacrifice a lamb or bring an offering of grain, it is as bad as putting a dog or the blood of a pig on the altar! When they burn incense, it is as if they had blessed an idol." In what words could the abhorrence of a creature's actions be more fully expressed by the holy God? Murder and idolatry are not more vile in his account, than their sacrifices, though materially such as he himself has appointed. And what made their sacrifices so vile? The following words inform us: "Their souls delight in their abominations."

Such is the vileness of mere heart-sins, that the Scriptures sometimes intimate the difficulty of pardon for them. The *heart* of Simon Magus was not right, he had base thoughts of God, and of the things of God: the apostle bade him "repent and pray, if perhaps the thoughts of his *heart* might be forgiven him." O then never slight heart evils! For by these, God is highly wronged and provoked. For this reason let every Christian keep his heart with all diligence.

**2. The sincerity of our profession much depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts.** Most certainly, that man who is careless of the frame of his heart, is but a hypocrite in his profession, however eminent he be in the externals of religion. We have a striking instance of this in the history of *Jehu*. "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord God of Israel with his heart." The context gives an account of the great service performed by Jehu against the house of Ahab

and Baal, and also of the great temporal reward given him by God for that service, even that his children, to the fourth generation, should sit upon the throne of Israel. Yet in these words Jehu is censured as a hypocrite. Though God approved and rewarded the work, yet he abhorred and rejected the person who did it, as hypocritical. Wherein lay the hypocrisy of Jehu? In this; he took no heed to walk in the ways of the Lord with his heart; that is, he did all insincerely and for selfish ends. And though the work he did was materially good, yet he, not purging his heart from those unworthy selfish designs in doing it, was a hypocrite.

And though *Simon Magus* appeared such a person that the apostle could not obviously reject him, yet his hypocrisy was quickly discovered. Though he professed piety and associated himself with the saints, he was a stranger to the mortification of heart-sins. "Your *heart* is not right with God."

It is true, there is great difference between Christians themselves in their diligence and dexterity about heart work; some are more conversant with, and more successful in it than others. But he who takes *no heed* to his heart, who is not careful to order it aright before God, is but a hypocrite. "My people come pretending to be sincere and sit before you listening. But they have no intention of doing what I tell them. They express love with their mouths, but their *hearts* seek only after money. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice." Here was a company of formal hypocrites, as is evident from that expression, *my people*; like them, but not of them. And what made them so? Their outside was fair; here were reverent postures, high professions, much seeming delight in ordinances. Yes, but for all that, they kept not their hearts with God in those duties; their hearts were commanded by their lusts, they went after their money. Had they kept their hearts with God, all had been well: but not regarding which way their hearts went in duty, there lay the essence of their hypocrisy.

If any upright soul should hence infer, 'I am a hypocrite too, for many times my heart departs from God in duty; do what I can, yet I cannot hold it close with God!' I answer, the very objection carries in it its own solution. You say, 'Do what I can, yet I cannot keep my heart with God.' Soul, if you do what you can, you have the blessing of an upright, though God sees good to exercise you under the affliction of a discomposed heart.

There still remains some wildness in the thoughts and fancies of the best Christians, to humble them; but if you find a concern before to prevent them, and opposition against them when they come, and grief and sorrow afterward, you find enough to clear you from the charge of reigning hypocrisy. This precaution is seen partly in laying up the word in your heart to prevent them. "Your word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against you." Partly in your endeavors to engage your heart to God; and partly in begging preventing grace from God in your commencement of duty. It is a good sign to exercise such precaution. And it is an evidence of uprightness, to oppose these sins in their first rise. "I hate vain thoughts." "The spirit lusts against the flesh." Your grief also reveals the uprightness of your heart. If with Hezekiah you are humbled for the evils of your heart, you have no reason, from those disorders, to question the integrity of it; but to allow sin to lodge quietly in the heart, to let your heart habitually and without control wander from God—is a sad, a dangerous symptom indeed!

**3. The beauty of our lives arises from the heavenly frame of our spirits.** There is a spiritual luster and beauty in the lives of saints. "The righteous is more excellent



than his neighbor;" saints shine as the lights of the world; but whatever luster and beauty is in their lives, comes from the excellency of their spirits; as the candle within puts luster upon the lantern in which it shines. It is impossible that a disordered and neglected heart should ever produce a well-ordered conversation; and since (as the text observes) the issues or streams of life flow out of the heart as their fountain, it must follow, that **such as the heart is—the life will be**. Hence 1 Peter 2:11-12, "Abstain from fleshly lusts—having your conversation honest," or beautiful, as the Greek word imports. So Isaiah, 55:7. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." His way, denotes the course of his life; his thoughts, the frame of his heart: and therefore since the course of his life flows from his thoughts, or the frame of his heart—neither will be forsaken.

The heart is the source of all actions; these actions are virtually and radically contained in our thoughts; these thoughts being once made up into affections, are quickly made out into suitable actions. If the heart is wicked, then, as Christ says, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders," etc. Mark the order: first, wanton or revengeful *thoughts*; then unclean, or murderous *practices*. And if the heart is holy, then it is as with David: "My *heart* is stirred by a noble theme as I recite my verses for the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer." Here is a life richly beautified with good works. Put the heart in frame and the life will quickly discover that it is so. It is not very difficult to discern, by the lives and converse of Christians, what frames their hearts are in. Take a Christian in a good frame of heart, and how serious, heavenly and profitable will his life and pious exercises be! What a lovely companion is he during the continuance of it! It would do any one's heart good to be with him at such a time.

"The mouth of the righteous speaks wisdom, and his tongue talks of judgment; he law of his God is in his *heart*." When the heart is up with God, and full of God, how dextrously will he insinuate spiritual discourse, improving every occasion and advantage to some heavenly purpose! Few words then run to waste. And what can be the reason that the discourses and duties of many Christians are become so frothy and unprofitable, their communion both with God and with one another becomes as a dry stalk, but this—their hearts are neglected? Surely this must be the reason of it, and it is an evil greatly to be bewailed.

Thus the attracting beauty which used to shine from the lives of the saints, upon the faces and consciences of the world, (which, if it did not allure and bring them in love with the ways of God, at least left a testimony in their consciences of the excellency of those men and of their ways,) is in a great measure lost, to the unspeakable detriment of religion. Time was, when Christians conducted in such a holy manner, that the world stood gazing at them. Their life and language were of a different strain from those of others, their tongues manifested them to be Galileans wherever they came. But now, since vain speculations and fruitless controversies have so much gained; and heart-work, practical godliness is so much neglected among professors, the case is sadly altered! Their discourse has become like other men's; if they come among you now, they may "hear every man speak in his own language." And I have little hope to see this evil redressed, and the credit of piety repaired, until Christians do their first works, until they apply again to heart-work! When the salt of heavenly-mindedness is cast into the spring—the streams will run more clear and more sweet.

**4. The comfort of our souls much depends upon the keeping of our hearts.** He who is negligent in attending to his own heart, is, ordinarily, a great stranger to assurance, and the comforts following from it. Indeed if the Antinomian doctrine were true, which teaches you to reject all marks and signs for the trial of your condition, telling you that it is the Spirit who immediately assures you, by witnessing your adoption directly, without them; then you might be careless of your hearts, yes, strangers to them, and yet no strangers to comfort. But since both

Scripture and experience confute this, I hope you will never look for comfort in this unscriptural way. I deny not that it is the work and office of the Spirit to assure you; yet I confidently affirm, that if ever you attain assurance in the ordinary way wherein God dispenses it, you must take pains with your own hearts. You may *expect* your comforts upon easier terms, but I am mistaken if ever you *enjoy* them upon any other terms but these: give all diligence; prove yourselves; this is the scriptural method.

One person, being sweetly settled and assured, another asked him how he attained it, he answered, "Not by any extraordinary revelation, but by subjecting my understanding to the Scriptures, and comparing my heart with them."

The Spirit, indeed, assures by witnessing our adoption; and he witnesses in two ways. One way is, **objectively**, that is, by producing those graces in our souls which are the conditions of the promise; and so the Spirit, and his graces in us, are all one. The Spirit of God dwelling in us, is a mark of our adoption. Now the Spirit can be discerned, not in his essence, but in his *operations*; and to discern these, is to discern the Spirit; and how these can be discerned without serious searching and diligent watching of the heart, I cannot imagine. The other way of the Spirit's witnessing is **effectively**, that is, by irradiating the soul with a grace discovering light, shining upon his own work; and this, in order of nature, follows the former work. *He first infuses the grace, and then opens the eye of the soul to see it.* Now, since the heart is the subject of that infused grace, even this way of the Spirit's witnessing includes the necessity of carefully keeping our own hearts. For,

**1. A neglected heart is so confused and dark, that the little grace which is in it, is not ordinarily discernible.** The most accurate and laborious Christians sometimes find it difficult to discover the pure and genuine workings of the Spirit in their hearts. How then shall the Christian who is comparatively negligent about heart-work, be ever able to discover grace? Sincerity—which is the thing sought, lies in the heart like a small piece of gold on the bottom of a river; he who would find it must stay until the water is clear, and then he will see it sparkling at the bottom. That the heart may be clear and settled, how much pains and watching, care and diligence, are requisite!

**2. God does not usually indulge negligent souls with the comforts of assurance.** He will not so much as seem to patronize sloth and carelessness. He will give assurance, but it shall be in his own way; his command has united our *care* and *comfort* together. Those are mistaken who think that assurance may be obtained without labor. Ah! How many solitary hours have the people of God spent in heart-examination! How many times have they looked into the word—and then into their hearts! Sometimes they thought they discovered sincerity, and were even ready to draw forth the triumphant conclusion of assurance; then comes a doubt they cannot resolve, and destroys it all: many hopes, and fears, doubtings and reasonings, they have had in their own breasts before they arrived at a comfortable settlement. But suppose it possible for a careless Christian to attain assurance, yet it is impossible for him long to retain it; for it is a thousand to one if those whose hearts are filled with the joys of assurance, long retain those joys, unless extraordinary care be used. A little pride, vanity, or carelessness will dash to pieces all that for which they have been a long time laboring in many a weary duty. Since then, the joy of our life, the comfort of our souls—rises and falls with our diligence in this work—keep your heart with all diligence!

**5. The improvement of our graces depends on the keeping of our hearts.** I never knew grace to thrive in a careless soul. The habits and roots of grace are planted in the heart; and the deeper they are rooted there, the more flourishing grace is. In Eph. 3:17, we read of being "rooted" in grace; grace in the heart is the root of every gracious word in the mouth, and of every holy work in the hand. It is true, Christ is

the root of a Christian, But Christ is the originating root, and grace a root planted and nourished by Christ. Accordingly, as this thrives under divine influences, the acts of grace are more or less fruitful or vigorous. Now, in a heart not kept with care and diligence, these fructifying influences are stopped and cut off—multitudes of vanities break in upon it, and devour its strength; the heart is, as it were, the enclosure, in which multitudes of thoughts are fed every day; a gracious heart, diligently kept, feeds many precious thoughts of God in a day. "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand! When I awake, I am still with you." And as the gracious heart nourishes them, so they refresh and feast the heart. "My soul is filled as with marrow and fatness while I think upon you," etc.

But in the disregarded heart, multitudes of vain and foolish thoughts are perpetually working, and drive out those spiritual thoughts of God by which the soul should be refreshed. Besides, the careless heart profits nothing by any duty or ordinance it performs or attends upon, and yet these are the conduits of heaven, whence grace is watered and made fruitful. A man may go with a heedless spirit from ordinance to ordinance, abide all his days under the choicest teaching, and yet never he improved by them; for heart-neglect is a leak in the bottom—no heavenly influences, however rich, abide in that soul. When the seed falls upon the heart which lies open and common, like the highway, free for all passengers, the fowls come and devour it. Alas! It is not enough to hear, unless we take heed **how** we hear; a man may pray, and never be the better, unless he watches unto prayer. In a word, all means are blessed to the improvement of grace, according to the care and strictness we use in keeping our hearts in them.

**6. The stability of our souls in the hour of TEMPTATION depends upon the care we exercise in keeping our hearts.** The careless heart is an easy prey to Satan in the hour of temptation. Satan's principal batteries are raised against the heart; if he wins that—he wins all, for the heart commands the whole man. Alas! how easy a conquest is a neglected heart! It is not more difficult to surprise such a heart, than for an enemy to enter that city whose gates are open and unguarded. It is the watchful heart which discovers and suppresses the temptation before it comes to its strength.

Divines observe this to be the method in which temptations are ripened and brought to their full strength. There is the power the temptation has to provoke our corrupt nature; which is either done by the real presence of the object, or by speculation when the object (though absent) is held out by the imagination before the soul.

Then follows the motion of the appetite, which is provoked by the imagination representing it as a sensual good. Then there is a consultation in the mind about the best means of accomplishing it.

Next follows the choice of the will. And lastly, the desire, or full engagement of the will to it. All this may be done in a few minutes, for the debates of the soul are quick and soon ended: when it comes thus far, the heart is won, Satan has entered victoriously and displayed his colors upon the walls of that royal fort. But, had the heart been well guarded at first, it would have never come to this—the temptation would have been stopped in the first or second stage. And indeed there it is stopped easily; for it is in the motion of a soul tempted to sin, as in the motion of a stone falling from the brow of a hill—it is easily stopped at first, but when once it is set in motion "it acquires strength by descending."

Therefore it is the greatest wisdom to observe the first motions of the heart—to check and stop sin there. The motions of sin are weakest at first; a little care and watchfulness may prevent much mischief now.

But the careless heart not heeding this, is brought within the power of temptation, as the Syrians were brought blindfold into the midst of Samaria, before they knew where they were.

I hope that these considerations satisfy my readers that it is important to keep the heart with all diligence. I proceed—to point out those special **seasons** in the life of a Christian which require our utmost diligence in keeping the heart.

# WHEN should we keep the heart.

I will now point out those **special seasons** in the life of a Christian which require our utmost diligence in keeping the heart. Though (as was observed before) the duty is always binding, and there is no time or condition of life in which we may be excused from this work; yet there are some special seasons, and critical hours, requiring more than common vigilance over the heart.

**1. The first season is the time of PROSPERITY**, when Providence smiles upon us. Now, Christian, keep your heart with all diligence; for it will be very apt to grow secure, proud and earthly. "To see a man humble in prosperity," (says Bernard,) "is one of the greatest rarities in the world." Even a good Hezekiah could not hide a vain-glorious temper in his temptation; hence that caution to Israel: "The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, **be careful not to forget the Lord**, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. You must fear the Lord your God and serve him. You must not worship any of the gods of neighboring nations, for the Lord your God, who lives among you, is a jealous God. His anger will flare up against you and wipe you from the face of the earth." Deuteronomy 6:10-15. So indeed it happened: for "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked."

How then may a Christian keep his heart from pride and carnal security, under the smiles of Providence and the confluence of creature comforts? There are several helps to secure the heart from the dangerous snares of prosperity.

**1. Consider the dangerous ensnaring temptations attending a pleasant and prosperous condition.** Few, very few of those who live in the pleasures of this world, escape everlasting perdition. "It is easier" (says Christ) "for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Not many mighty, not many noble are called."

We have great reason to tremble, when the Scripture tells us in general that few shall be saved; much more when it tells us, that of that rank of which we are, but few shall be saved. When Joshua called all the tribes of Israel to cast lots for the discovery of Achan, doubtless Achan feared; when the tribe of Judah was taken, his fear increased; but when the family of the Zarhites was taken, it was time to tremble. So when the Scriptures come so near as to tell us that of such a class of men, very few shall escape—it is time to be alarmed. "I wonder" (says Chrysostom) "if any of the rulers are saved." O how many have been wheeled to hell in the chariots of earthly pleasures, while others have been whipped to heaven by the rod of affliction! How few, like the daughter of Tyre, come to Christ with a gift! How few among the rich entreat his favor!

**2. It may keep one more humble and watchful in prosperity, to consider that among Christians many have been much the worse for prosperity.** How good had it been for some of them, if they had never known prosperity! When they were in a low condition—how humble, spiritual and heavenly they were! But when advanced, what an apparent alteration has been upon their spirits! It was so with

Israel; when they were in a low condition in the wilderness, then Israel was "holiness to the Lord." But when they came into Canaan and were richly fed, their language was, "We are lords, we will come no more unto you". Outward gains are ordinarily attended with inward losses; as in a low condition their civil employments were accustomed to have a savor of their religious duties, so in an exalted condition their duties commonly have a savor of the world. He, indeed, is rich in grace whose graces are not hindered by his riches. There are but few Jehoshaphats in the world, of whom it is said, "He had silver and gold in abundance, and he sought the Lord with all his heart." Will not this keep your heart humble in prosperity, to think how dearly many godly men have paid for their riches; that through them they have lost that which all the world cannot purchase?

**3. Keep down your vain heart by this consideration; God values no man the more for these things.** God values no man by outward excellencies, but by inward graces; they are the internal ornaments of the Spirit, which are of great price in God's sight. God despises all worldly glory, and accepts no man's person; "but in every nation, he who fears God and works righteousness is accepted of him." Indeed, if the judgment of God went by the same rule that man's does—then we might value ourselves by these things, and stand upon them. But so much every man is—as he is in the judgment of God. Does your heart yet swell, and will neither of the former considerations keep it humble?

**4. Consider how bitterly many dying people have bewailed their folly in setting their hearts upon these things, and have wished that they had never known them.** How dreadful was the situation of Pope Quintus, who died crying out despairingly, "When I was in a low condition I had some hopes of salvation, when I was advanced to be a cardinal, I greatly doubted; but since I came to the popedom I have no hope at all." An author also tells us a real, but sad story of a rich oppressor, who had scraped up a great estate for his only son: when he came to die he called his son to him, and said, "Son, do you indeed love me?" The son answered that "Nature, besides his fatherly care, obliged him to that." "Then (said the father) express it by this: hold your finger in the candle as long as I am saying a prayer." The son attempted, but could not endure it. Upon that the father broke out into these expressions: "You can not suffer the burning of your finger for me; but to get this wealth I have hazarded my soul for you and must burn, body and soul, in hell, for your sake! Your pains would have been but for a moment, but mine will be unquenchable fire!"

**5. The heart may be kept humble by considering of what a clogging nature earthly things are to a soul heartily engaged in the way to heaven.** They shut out much of heaven from us at present, though they may not shut us out of heaven at last. If you consider yourself as a stranger in this world, traveling for heaven, you have then as much reason to be delighted with these things as a weary horse has to be pleased with a heavy burden. There was a serious truth in the atheistic scoff of Julian: when taking away the Christians' estates, he told them "it was to make them more fit for the kingdom of heaven."

**6. Is your spirit still vain and lofty? Then urge upon it the consideration of that dreadful day of reckoning, wherein, according to our receipts of mercies—shall be our account for them.** Methinks this should awe and humble the vainest heart that ever was in the bosom of a saint. Know for a certainty that the Lord records all the mercies that ever he gave you, from the beginning to the end of your life. 'Remember, O my people, from Acacia unto Gilgal,' etc. Yes, they are exactly numbered and recorded in order to an account; and your account will be suitable: "To whomever much is given, of him shall much be required." You are but a steward, and your Lord will come and take an account of you; and what a great account have you to make, who have much of this world in your hands! What swift witnesses will your mercies be against you, if this be the best fruit of them!

**7. It is a very humbling reflection—that the mercies of God should work otherwise upon my spirit, than they used to do upon the spirits of others to whom they come as sanctified mercies from the love of God.** Ah, Lord! What a sad consideration is this! Enough to lay me in the dust, when I consider:

**(1.) That their mercies have greatly humbled them, the higher God has raised them, the lower they have laid themselves before him. Thus did Jacob when God had given him much substance.** "And Jacob said, I am not worthy of the least of all your mercies, and all the truth which you have showed your servant." Thus also it was with holy David; when God had confirmed the promise to him, to build a house for him, and not reject him as he did Saul, he goes in before the Lord and says, "Who am I, and what is my father's house, that you have brought me hitherto?" So indeed God required. When Israel brought to him the first fruits of Canaan, they were to say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father," etc. Do others raise God the higher for his raising them? And the more God raises me—the more shall I abuse him and exalt myself? O how wicked is such conduct as this!

**(2.) Others have freely ascribed the glory of all their enjoyments to God, and magnified not themselves, but him, for their mercies.** Thus says David, "Let your name be magnified and the house of your servant be established." He does not fly upon the mercy and suck out its sweetness, looking no further than his own comfort. No! He cares for no mercy, unless God is magnified in it. So when God had delivered him from all his enemies, he says, "The Lord is my strength and my rock, he has become my salvation." Saints of old did not put the crown upon their own heads as I do by my vanity.

**(3.) The mercies of God have been melting mercies unto others, melting their souls in love to the God of their mercies.** When Hannah received the mercy of a son, she said, "My soul rejoices in the Lord;" not in the mercy, but in the God of the mercy. So also Mary: "My soul does magnify the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." The word signifies to make more room for God; their hearts were not contracted, but the more enlarged to God.

**(4.) The mercies of God have been great restraints to keep others from sin.** "Seeing you, our God, have given us such a deliverance as this, should we again break your commandments?" Ingenuous souls have felt the force of the obligations of love and mercy upon them.

**(5.) The mercies of God to others have been as oil to the wheels of their obedience, and made them more fit for service.** Now if mercies work contrarily upon my heart, what cause have I to be afraid that they come not to me in love! It is enough to damp the spirits of any saint—to see what sweet effects mercies have had upon others—and what bitter effects upon him!

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

## **The second season in the life of a Christian, requiring more than common diligence to keep his heart, is the time of**

**ADVERSITY.** When Providence frowns upon you, and blasts your outward comforts—then look to your heart; keep it with all diligence from repining against God or fainting under his hand; for troubles, though sanctified, are troubles still. *Jonah* was a godly man, and yet how fretful was his heart under affliction! *Job* was the mirror of patience—yet how was his heart discomposed by trouble! You will find it hard to get a composed spirit under great afflictions. O the hurries and tumults which they occasion even in the best hearts! Let me show you, then, how a Christian under great afflictions may keep his heart from repining or desponding, under the hand of God. I will here offer several helps to keep the heart in this condition.

**1. By these cross providences God is faithfully pursuing the great design of electing love upon the souls of his people, and orders all these afflictions as means sanctified to that end.** Afflictions come not by chance—but by counsel. By the counsel of God, they are ordained as means of much spiritual good to saints. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged," etc. "But he disciplines us for our profit," etc. "All things work together for good," etc. afflictions are God's workmen upon our hearts, to pull down our pride and carnal; and being so, their nature is changed; they are turned into blessings and benefits! "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," says David. Surely then you have no reason to quarrel with God—but rather to wonder that he should concern himself so much in your good, as to use any means for accomplishing it. Paul could bless God if by any means he might attain the resurrection of the dead. "My brethren," says James, "count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials." 'My Father is about a design of love upon my soul, and do I do well to be angry with him? All that he does, is in pursuance of, and in reference to some eternal, glorious ends upon my soul. It is my ignorance of God's design that makes me quarrel with him.' He says to you in this case, as he did to Peter, "What I do, you know not now—but you shall know hereafter."

**2. Though God has reserved to himself a liberty of afflicting his people—yet he has tied up his own hands by promise never to take away his loving kindness from them.** Can I contemplate this scripture with a repining, discontented spirit: "I will be his Father, and he shall be my son: if he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men: nevertheless my mercy shall not depart away from him." O my heart, my haughty heart! Do you do well to be discontent, when God has given you the whole tree, with all the clusters of comfort growing on it, because he allows the wind to blow down a few leaves? Christians have two kinds of goods, the goods of the throne and the goods of the footstool; immovables and moveables. If God has secured those, never let my heart be troubled at the loss of these: indeed, if he had cut off his love, or discovered my soul, I would have reason to be cast down; but this he has not done, nor can he do it.

**3. It is of great efficacy to keep the heart from sinking under afflictions, to call to mind that your own Father has the ordering of them.** Not a creature moves hand or tongue against you—but by his wise permission. Suppose the cup is bitter—yet it is the cup which your Father has given you! Can you suspect poison to be in it? Foolish man, put home the case to your own heart; can you give your child that which would ruin him? No! You would as soon hurt yourself as him. "If you then,



being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," how much more does God! The very consideration of his *nature* as a God of love, pity, and tender mercies; or of his *relation* to you as a father, husband, friend—may be security enough, if he had not spoken a word to quiet you in this case. And yet you have his word too, by the prophet Jeremiah: "I will do you no hurt." You lie too near his heart for him to hurt you. Nothing grieves him more than your groundless and unworthy suspicions of his wise and kind designs. Would it not grieve a faithful, tender-hearted physician, when he had studied the case of his patient, and prepared the most excellent medicines to save his life, to hear him cry out, 'O he has undone me! he has poisoned me!' because it pains him in the operation? O when will you be submissive?

**4. God respects you as much in a low condition—as in a high condition;** and therefore it need not so much trouble you to be made low; no, he manifests more of his love, grace and tenderness in the time of affliction—than in the time of prosperity. As God did not at first choose you because you were high, he will not now forsake you because you are low. Men may look shy upon you, and alter their respects as your condition is altered; when Providence has blasted your estate, your summer-friends may grow strange, fearing you may be troublesome to them. But will God do so? No! no! "I will never leave you nor forsake you" says he. If adversity and poverty could bar you from access to God, it would indeed be a deplorable condition: but, so far from this, you may go to him as freely as ever. "My God will hear me," says the church. Poor David, when stripped of all earthly comforts, could encourage himself in the Lord his God; and why not you? Suppose your husband or son had lost all at sea, and should come to you in rags; could you deny the relation, or refuse to entertain him? If you would not, much less will God. Why then are you so troubled? Though your condition is changed, your Father's love is not changed.

**5. What if by the loss of outward comforts, God preserves your soul from the ruining power of temptation?** Surely then you have little cause to sink your heart by such sad thoughts. Do not earthly enjoyments make men shrink in times of trial? For the love of these, many have forsaken Christ in such an hour. The young ruler "went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." If this is God's design, how ungrateful to murmur against him for it! We see mariners in a storm can throw overboard the most valuable goods to preserve their lives. We know it is usual for soldiers in a besieged city to destroy the finest buildings in which the enemy may take shelter; and no one doubts that it is wisely done. Those who have decayed limbs willingly stretch them out to be cut off, and not only *thank*—but *pay* the surgeon! Must God be murmured against for casting over that which would sink you in a storm; for pulling down that which would assist your enemy in the siege of temptation; for cutting off what would endanger your everlasting life? O, inconsiderate, ungrateful man! Are not these things for which you grieve, the very things that have ruined thousands of souls?

**6. It would much support your heart under adversity, to consider that God by such humbling providences may be accomplishing that for which you have long prayed and waited.** And should you be troubled at that? Say, Christian, have you not many prayers pending before God upon such accounts as these; that he would keep you from sin; that he would discover to you the emptiness of the creature; that he would mortify and kill your lusts; that your heart may never find rest in any enjoyment but Christ? By such humbling and impoverishing strokes, God may be fulfilling your desires! Would you be kept from sin? Lo, he has hedged up your way with thorns. Would you see the creature's vanity? Your affliction is a looking glass to reveal it; for the vanity of the creature is never so effectually and sensibly discovered, as in our own experience. Would you have your corruptions mortified? This is the way—to have the fuel removed which maintained them; for as prosperity begat and fed them, so adversity, when sanctified, is a means to kill them. Would

you have your heart rest nowhere but in the bosom of God? What better method could Providence take to accomplish your desire, than pulling from under your head that soft pillow of *creature delights* on which you rested before? And yet you fret at this! Peevish child, how do you try your Father's patience! If he delays to answer your prayers, you are ready to say that he regards you not. If he does that which really answers the end of your prayers, though not in the way which you expect, you murmur against him for that! As if, instead of answering, he were crossing all your hopes and aims. Is this sincerity? Is it not enough that God is so gracious as to do what you desire: must you be so impudent as to expect him to do it in the way which *you* prescribe?

**7. It may support your heart, to consider that in these troubles God is performing that work in which your soul would rejoice—if you did see the design of it.** We are clouded with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences tend to the fulfillment of God's designs; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring, because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to difficulties; though then he led them, and is now leading us, by the *right* way to a city of habitation. If you could but see how God in his secret counsel has exactly laid the whole plan of your salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances; could you but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations, together with the general respect they all have to the last end; had you liberty to make your own choice, you would, of all conditions in the world, choose that in which you now are! Providence is like a curious piece of tapestry made of a thousand shreds, which, single, appear useless—but put together, they represent a beautiful history to the eye. As God does all things according to the counsel of his own will, of course this is ordained at the best method to effect your salvation. Such a one has a *proud* heart—so many humbling providences appoint for him. Such a one has an *earthly* heart—so many impoverishing providences for him. Did you but see this, I need say no more to support the most dejected heart.

**8. It would much conduce to the settlement of your heart, to consider that by fretting and discontent, you do yourself more injury than all your afflictions could do.** Your own discontent is that which arms your troubles with a sting. You make your burden heavy—by struggling under it. Did you but lie quietly under the hand of God, your condition would be much more easy than it is. "Impatience in the sick, brings severity in the physician." This makes God afflict the more, as a father a stubborn child—who does not receive correction. Beside, it unfits the soul to pray over its troubles, or receive the sense of that good which God intends by them. Affliction is a pill, which, being wrapped up in patience and quiet submission, may be easily swallowed; but discontent chews the pill, and so embitters the soul. God throws away some comfort which he saw would hurt you—and you will throw away your peace after it? He shoots an arrow which sticks in your clothes, and was never intended to hurt—but only to drive you from sin; and you will thrust it deeper, to the piercing of your very heart, by despondency and discontent.

**9. If your heart (like that of Rachel) still refuses to be comforted, then do one thing more: compare the condition you are now in, and with which you are so much dissatisfied, with the condition in which others are, and in which you deserve to be.** "Others are roaring in flames, howling under the scourge of vengeance—and among them I deserve to be! O my soul, is this hell? Is my condition as bad as that of the damned? What would thousands now in hell give to exchange conditions with me!" I have read (says an author) that when the Duke of Conde had voluntarily subjected himself to the inconveniences of poverty, he was one day observed and pitied by a noble of Italy, who from tenderness wished him to be more careful of his person. The good duke answered, "Sir, be not troubled, and do not think that I suffer from need; for I send a harbinger before me, who makes ready my lodgings and takes care that I am royally entertained." The noble asked

him who was his harbinger? He answered, "The knowledge of myself, and the consideration of what I deserve for my sins, which is eternal torment; when with this knowledge I arrive at my lodging, however unprovided I find it—methinks it is much better than I deserve. Why does the living man complain?" Thus the heart may be kept from desponding or repining under adversity.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The next season calling for more than ordinary diligence to keep the heart—is the time of Zion's troubles.** When the **Church**, like the ship in which Christ and his disciples were, is oppressed and ready to perish in the waves of persecution, then good souls are ready to be shipwrecked too, upon the billows of their own fears. It is true, most men need the spur rather than the reins in this case; yet some men sit down discouraged under a sense of the Church's troubles. The loss of the ark cost Eli his life; the sad posture in which Jerusalem lay, made good Nehemiah's countenance change in the midst of all the pleasures and accommodations of the court. But though God allows, yes, commands the most awakened apprehensions of these calamities, and in "such a day calls to mourning, weeping, and girding with sackcloth," and severely threatens the insensible ones; yet it will not please him to see you sit like pensive Elijah under the juniper tree. "Ah, Lord God! It is enough, take away my life also." No! A mourner in Zion you may and ought to be—but a self-tormentor you must not be! Complain to God you may—but complain of God (though but by the language of your actions) you must not.

Now let us inquire how tender hearts may be relieved and supported, when they are even overwhelmed with the burdensome sense of Zion's troubles? I grant it is hard for him who prefers Zion to his chief joy, to keep his heart that it sink not below the due sense of its troubles; yet this ought to, and may be done, by the use of such heart-establishing directions as these:

**1. Settle this great truth in your heart—that no trouble befalls Zion but by the permission of Zion's God; and he permits nothing out of which he will not ultimately bring much good to his people.** Comfort may be derived from reflections on the *permitting*, as well as on the *commanding* will of God. "Let him alone, it may be God has bidden him." "You could have no power against me, except it were given you from above." It should much calm our hearts—that it is the will of God to allow it; and that, had he not allowed it—it could never have been as it is. This very consideration quieted Job, Eli, David, and Hezekiah. That the Lord did it—was enough to them: and why should it not be so to us? If the Lord will have Zion ploughed as a field, and her goodly stones lie in the dust; if it be his pleasure that Anti-Christ shall rage yet longer and wear out the saints of the Most High; if it be his will that a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord Almighty, shall be upon the valley of vision, that the wicked shall devour the man that is more righteous than he; what are we, that we should contend with God? It is fit that we should be resigned to that will whence we proceeded, and that He who made us should dispose of us as he pleases! He may do what seems good to him—without our consent. Does poor man stand upon equal ground, that he may contend with his Creator; or that God should render him an account of any of his matters? That we be content, however God may dispose of us—is as reasonable as that we be obedient, whatever he may require of us.

But if we pursue this argument farther, and consider that God's *permissions* all meet at last in the real good of his people, this will much more quiet our spirits. Do the enemies carry away the best among the people into captivity? This looks like a distressing providence; but God sends them there for their good. Does God take the Assyrian as a rod in his hand, to beat his people with? The end of his so doing is,

"that he may accomplish his whole work upon Mount Zion." If God can bring much good out of the greatest evil of sin, much more out of temporal afflictions; and that he will, is as evident as that he can do so. For it is inconsistent with the wisdom of a common man to permit anything (which he might prevent if he pleased) to cross his great design; and can it be imagined that the most wise God should do so? As, then, Luther said to Melancthon, so say I to you: "Let infinite wisdom, power and love alone!" for by these all creatures are swayed, and all actions guided, in reference to the church. It is not our work to rule the world—but to submit to Him who does rule the world! The motions of Providence are all judicious, the wheels are full of eyes: it is enough that the affairs of Zion are in a good, wise and powerful hand!

**2. Ponder this heart-supporting truth: however many troubles are upon Zion—yet her King is in her.** What! Has the Lord forsaken his churches? Has he sold them into the enemy's hands? Does he not see what evil befalls them, that our hearts sink thus? Is it not shamefully undervaluing the great God, and too much magnifying poor impotent man—to fear and tremble at *creatures*, while God is in the midst of us? The church's enemies are many and mighty: let that be granted—yet that argument with which Caleb and Joshua strove to raise their own hearts, is of as much force now as it was then: "The Lord is with us—do not fear them!"

A historian tells us, that when Antigonus overheard his soldiers reckoning how many their enemies were, and so discouraging one another, he suddenly stepped in among them with this question, "And how many do you reckon me for?" Discouraged souls, how many do you reckon the Lord for? Is he not an overmatch for all his enemies? Is not one *Almighty* more than many mighties? "If God is for us—who can be against us?" What think you was the reason of that great examination Gideon made? He questions, he desires a sign, and after that, another sign. And what was the end of all this—but that he might be sure the Lord was with him, and that he might but write this motto upon his ensign: "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" So if you can be well assured the Lord is with his people, you will thereby rise above all your discouragements: and that he is so, you need not require a sign from heaven; lo, you have a sign before you, even their marvelous preservation amid all their enemies. If God be not with his people, how is it that they are not swallowed up quickly? Do their enemies lack malice, power, or opportunity? No—but there is an invisible hand upon them! Let then his presence give us rest; and though the mountains be hurled into the sea, though heaven and earth mingle together—fear not—God is in the midst of Zion, she shall not be moved!

**3. Consider the great advantages attending the people of God in an afflicted condition.** If a low and an afflicted state in the world, is really best for the church, then your dejection is not only irrational—but ungrateful. Indeed, if you estimate the happiness of the church by its worldly ease, splendor and prosperity—then such times of affliction will appear to be unfavorable. But if you reckon its glory to consist in its humility, faith, and heavenly-mindedness, no condition so much abounds with advantages for these—as an afflicted condition. It was not persecutions and prisons—but worldliness and prosperity, which poisoned the church! Neither was it the earthly glory of its professors—but the blood of its martyrs, which was the seed of the church. The power of godliness did never thrive better than in affliction, and was never less thriving than in times of greatest prosperity! When "we are left as a poor and afflicted people, then we learn to trust in the name of the Lord."

It is indeed for the saints' advantage to be weaned from love of, and delight in, ensnaring earthly vanities; to be quickened and urged forward with more haste to heaven; to have clearer discoveries of their own hearts; to be taught to pray more fervently, frequently, spiritually; to look and long for the heavenly rest more ardently. If these are for their advantage, experience teaches us that no condition is ordinarily blessed with such fruits as these, like an afflicted condition.

Is it well then to repine and droop, because your Father consults the advantage of your soul, rather than the gratification of your fleshly desires? Is it well then to repine and droop, because he will bring you to heaven by a nearer way than you are willing to go? Is this a due requital of his love, who is pleased so much to concern himself in your welfare—who does more for you than he will do for thousands in the world, upon whom he will not lay a rod, or dispense an affliction to them for their good? But alas! We judge by sense, and reckon things good or evil, according to our present taste!

**4. Take heed that you overlook not the many precious mercies which the people of God enjoy amid all their trouble.**

It is a pity that our tears on account of our troubles should so blind our eyes—that we should not see our mercies! There are many outward comforts which you presently enjoy—above what were enjoyed by Christ and his precious servants, of whom the world was not worthy. What do you think of pardon of sin; a saving interest in Christ; the covenant of promise; and an eternity of happiness in the presence of God—after these few suffering days are over? O that a people entitled to such mercies as these, should droop under any temporal affliction, or be so much concerned for the frowns of men, and the loss of trifles! You have not the smiles of great men—but you have the favor of the great God; you are perhaps diminished in temporal mercies—but you are thereby increased in spiritual and eternal mercies. You cannot live so plentifully as before; but you may live as heavenly as ever. Will you grieve so much for these circumstances as to forget your substantial eternal mercies? Shall light troubles make you forget weighty mercies? Remember, the true riches of the church are laid out of the reach of all enemies. What though God does not in his outward dispensations distinguish between his own and others? Yes, what though his judgments single out the best, and spare the worst? What though an Abel is killed, and a Cain survives? What though a bloody Dionysius dies peacefully in his bed, and a good Josiah falls in battle? What though the belly of the wicked is filled with worldly dainties, and the teeth of the saints are filled with gravel-stones? Still there is much matter of praise; for electing love has distinguished, though common providence has not! And while prosperity and impunity slay the wicked, even slaying and adversity shall benefit and save the righteous.

**5. Believe that however low the church is plunged under the waters of adversity—she shall assuredly rise again!**

Fear not; for as surely as Christ arose the third day, notwithstanding the seal and guard over him; so surely Zion shall arise out of all her troubles, and lift up her victorious head over all her enemies. There is no reason to fear the ruin of that people who thrive by their losses, and multiply by being diminished. Be not too hasty to bury the church before she is dead; stay until Christ has tried his skill, before you give her up for lost. The bush may be all in a flame—but shall never be consumed; and that because of the good will of Him who dwells in it.

**6. Remember the instances of God's care and tenderness over his people in former difficulties.**

For over eighteen hundred years the Christian church has been in affliction, and yet it is not consumed. Many a wave of persecution has gone over it—yet it is not drowned. Many devices have been formed against it, hitherto none of them has prospered. This is not the first time that Hamans and Ahithophels have plotted its ruin; that a Herod has stretched out his hand to vex it; still it has been preserved from, supported under, or delivered out of—all its troubles. Is it not as dear to God as ever? Is he not as able to save it now as formerly? Though we know not whence deliverance should arise, "yet the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations."

**7. If you can derive no comfort from any of these considerations, try to draw some comfort out of your very trouble.**

Surely this trouble of yours is a good evidence of your integrity. If you had not some rich treasure in that ship, you would

not tremble as you do when it is in danger. Beside this frame of spirit may afford you this consolation, that if you are so sensible of Zion's trouble, Jesus Christ is much more sensible of and solicitous about it than you can be—and he will have an eye of favor upon those who mourn for it.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The next season requiring our utmost diligence to keep our hearts—is the time of danger, and public disturbance.** In such times the best hearts are too apt to be surprised by slavish fear. If Syria is confederate with Ephraim, how do the hearts of the house of David shake—even as the trees of the forest are shaken with the wind. When there are ominous signs in the heavens, or the distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring—then the hearts of men fail for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth. Even a Paul may sometimes complain of "fightings within, when there are fears without."

But, my brethren, these things ought not so to be; saints should be of a more elevated spirit; so was David when his heart was kept in a good frame: "The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" Let none but the servants of sin, be the slaves of fear; let those who have delighted in evil, fear evil. Let not that which God has threatened as a judgment upon the wicked, ever seize upon the hearts of the righteous. "I will send faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies, and the sound of a shaking leaf shall chase them." What poor spirited men are those, to fly at a shaking leaf! A leaf makes a pleasant, not a terrible noise; it makes indeed a kind of natural music: but to a guilty conscience even the whistling leaves are drums and trumpets!

"But God has not given us the spirit of fear—but of love and of a sound mind." A sound mind, as it stands there in opposition to fear, is an unwounded conscience not weakened by guilt: and this should make a man as bold as a lion. I know it cannot be said of a saint, as God said of leviathan, that he is made without fear; there is a natural fear in every man, and it is as impossible to remove it wholly, as to remove the body itself. Fear is perturbation of the mind, arising from the apprehension of approaching danger; and as long as dangers can approach us, we shall find some perturbations within us. It is not my purpose to commend to you a stoical apathy, nor yet to dissuade you from such a degree of cautionary preventive fear as may fit you for trouble and be serviceable to your soul. There is a provident fear that opens our eyes to foresee danger, and quickens us to a prudent and lawful use of means to prevent it: such was Jacob's fear, and such his prudence when expecting to meet his angry brother Esau. But it is the fear of distrust, from which I would dissuade you—that tyrannical passion which invades the heart in times of danger, distracts, weakens and unfits it for duty, drives men upon unlawful means, and brings a snare with it.

Now let us inquire how a Christian may keep his heart from distracting and tormenting fears in times of great and threatening dangers. There are several excellent rules for keeping the heart from sinful fear, when imminent dangers threaten us:

**1. Look upon all creatures as in the hand of God, who manages them in all their motions—limiting, restraining and regulating them at his pleasure.** Get this great truth well settled by faith in your heart—and it will guard you against slavish fears. The first chapter of Ezekiel contains an admirable picture of Providence: there you see the living creatures who move the wheels (that is, the great revolutions of things here below) coming unto Christ, who sits upon the throne, to receive new instructions from him. In Revelation 6, you read of white,



black, and red horses—which are but the instruments God employs in executing judgments in the world—such as wars, pestilence, and death. When these horses are prancing and trampling up and down in the world, here is a consideration that may quiet our hearts—God has the reins in his hand! Wicked men are sometimes like mad horses, they would stamp the people of God under their feet—but the *bridle of Providence* is in their mouths! A lion at liberty is terrible to meet—but who is afraid of a lion in the keeper's hand?

**2 Remember that this God in whose hand are all creatures, is your Father, and is much more tender of you—than you are, or can be, of yourself.** "He who touches you, touches the apple of my eye." Let me ask the most timorous woman whether there is not a great difference between the sight of a drawn sword in the hand of a bloody ruffian, and of the same sword in the hand of her own tender husband? As great a difference there is between looking upon creatures by an eye of sense, and looking on them, as in the hand of your God, by an eye of faith. Isaiah, 54: 5, is here very appropriate: "Your Maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name;" he is Lord of all the creatures. Who would be afraid to pass through an army, though all the soldiers should turn their swords and guns toward him, if the commander of that army were his friend or father?

A pious young man being at sea with many other passengers in a great storm, and they being half dead with fear, he only was observed to be very cheerful, as if he were but little concerned in that danger; one of them demanding the reason of his cheerfulness, "O," said he, "it is because the pilot of the ship is my Father!" Consider Christ first as the King and supreme Lord over the providential kingdom; and then as your head, husband and friend—and you will quickly say, "Return unto your rest, O my soul." This truth will make you cease trembling, and cause you to sing in the midst of danger, "The Lord is King of all the earth, sing praise with understanding." That is, 'Let everyone that has understanding of this heart-reviving and establishing doctrine of the dominion of our Father over all creatures, sing praise.'

**3 Urge upon your heart the express prohibitions of Christ in this case, and let your heart stand in awe of the violation of them.** He has charged you not to fear: "When we shall hear of wars and commotions, see that you be not terrified." "In nothing be terrified by your adversaries." In Matthew 10, within the compass of six verses, our Savior commands us thrice "not to fear men." Does the voice of a *man* make you to tremble, and shall not the voice of *God*? If you are of such a timorous spirit, how is it that you fear not to disobey the commands of Jesus Christ? Methinks the command of Christ should have as much power to calm, as the voice of a poor worm to terrify your heart! "I, even I, am he who comforts you: who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man that shall be made as the grass, and forget the Lord your Maker?" We cannot fear creatures sinfully, until we have forgotten God. Did we remember what God is, and what he has said—we would not be of such feeble spirits. Bring yourself then to this reflection in times of danger: 'If I let into my heart the slavish fear of man, I must let out the reverential awe and fear of God; and dare I cast off the fear of the Almighty for the frowns of a man? Shall I lift up proud dust above the great God? Shall I run upon a certain sin, to shun a probable danger?' O keep your heart by this consideration!

**4 Remember how much needless trouble your vain fears have brought upon you formerly.** "And have feared continually because of the oppressor, as if he were ready to devour; and where is the fury of the oppressor?" He seemed ready to devour—yet you are not devoured. I have not brought upon you the thing that you feared; you have wasted your spirit, disordered your soul, and weakened your hands to no purpose: you might have all this while enjoyed your peace, and possessed your soul in patience. And here I cannot but observe a very wily strategy of Satan in

managing a design against the soul by these vain fears. I call them vain, with reference to the frustration of them by Providence; but certainly they are not in vain as the end at which Satan aims in raising them; for herein he acts as soldiers do in the siege of a garrison, who to wear out the besieged by constant watchings, and thereby unfit them to make resistance when they storm it in earnest, every night rouse them with false alarms, which though they come to nothing, yet remarkably answer the ultimate design of the enemy. O when will you beware of Satan's devices?

**5. Consider solemnly, that though the things you fear should really happen—yet there is more evil in your own fear—than in the things feared!** And that, not only as the least evil of sin is worse than the greatest evil of suffering; but as this sinful fear has really more trouble in it than there is in that condition of which you are so much afraid! Fear is both a multiplying and a tormenting passion; it represents troubles as much greater than they are—and so tortures the soul much more than the suffering itself. So it was with Israel at the Red Sea; they cried out and were afraid, until they stepped into the water, and then a passage was opened through those waters which they thought would have drowned them. Thus it is with us; we, looking through the telescope of carnal fear upon the waters of trouble, the swellings of Jordan, cry out, 'O they are unfordable; we must perish in them!' But when we come into the midst of those floods indeed, we find the promise made good: "God will make a way to escape."

Thus it was with a blessed martyr; when he would make a trial by putting his finger to the candle, and found himself not able to endure that, he cried out, "What! Cannot I bear the burning of a finger? How then shall I be able to bear the burning of my whole body tomorrow?" But when that tomorrow came, he could go cheerfully into the flames with this scripture in his mouth: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine; when you pass through the waters I will be with you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burnt."

**6. Consult the many precious promises which are written for your support and comfort in all dangers.** These are your refuges to which you may fly and be safe when the *arrows of danger* fly by night, and destruction wastes at noon-day. There are particular promises suited to *particular* cases and exigencies; there are also general promises reaching *all* cases and conditions. Such as these: "All things shall work together for good," etc. "It shall be well with those who fear the Lord," etc. Could you but believe the promises, your heart should be established. Could you but plead them with God as Jacob did, ("You said, I will surely do you good," &c.) they would relieve you in every distress.

**7. Quiet your trembling heart by recording and consulting your past experiences of the care and faithfulness of God in former distresses.** These experiences are food for your faith in a wilderness. By this David kept his heart in time of danger, and Paul his. It was answered by a saint, when one told him that his enemies waiting to take his life: "If God takes no care of me, how is it that I have escaped hitherto?" You may plead with God old experiences for new ones: for it is in pleading with God for new deliverances, as it is in pleading for new pardons. Mark how Moses pleads of that account with God. "Pardon, I beseech you, the iniquity of this people, as you have forgiven them from Egypt until now." He does not say as men do, 'Lord, this is the *first fault*, you have not been troubled before to sign their pardon.' But, 'Lord, because you have pardoned them so often—I beseech you pardon them once again.' So in new difficulties let the saint say, 'Lord, you have often heard, helped and saved, in former years; therefore now help again, for with you there is plenteous redemption, and your arm is not shortened.'

**8. Be well satisfied that you are in the way of your duty—and that will beget holy courage in times of danger.** "Who will harm you—if you are a follower of that which is good?" Or if any dare attempt to harm you "you may boldly commit yourself to God in well-doing." It was this consideration that raised Luther's spirit above all fear: "In the cause of God (said he) I ever am, and ever shall be stout: herein I assume this title, 'I yield to none!'" A good cause will bear up a man's spirit. Hear the saying of a heathen, to the shame of cowardly Christians. When the emperor Vespasian had commanded Fluidus Priseus not to come to the senate, or if he did come, to speak nothing but what he would have him speak; the senator returned this noble answer, "that he was a senator, it was fit he should be at the senate; and if being there, he were required to give his advice, he would freely speak that which his conscience commanded him." The emperor threatening that then he would die; he answered, "Did I ever tell you that I was immortal? You do what you will—and I will do what I ought. It is in your power to put me to death unjustly, and in my power to die with constancy." Righteousness is a breastplate: let them tremble, whom danger finds out of the way of duty.

**9. Get your conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ from all guilt, and that will set your heart above all fear.** It is guilt upon the conscience which softens and makes cowards people. "The righteous are as bold as a lion." It was guilt in Cain's conscience which made him cry, "everyone that finds me will slay me!" A guilty conscience is more terrified by *imagined* dangers, than a pure conscience is by real ones! A guilty sinner carries a witness against himself in his own bosom. It was guilty Herod cried out, "John Baptist has risen from the dead" A guilty conscience is the devil's anvil, on which he fabricates all those swords and spears with which the guilty sinner pierces himself. Guilt is to dangers—what fire is to gun-powder: a man need not fear to walk among many barrels of powder, if he has no fire about him.

**10. Exercise holy trust in times of great distress.** Make it your business to trust God with your life and comforts—and then your heart will be at rest about them. So did David, "At what time I am afraid I will trust in you:" that is, 'Lord, if at any time a storm arises, I will shelter from it under the covert of your wings.' Go to God by acts of faith and trust, and never doubt that he will secure you. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you," says Isaiah. God is pleased when you come to him thus: 'Father, my life, my liberty and my estate are exposed, and I cannot secure them; O let me leave them in your hand!'

The poor leaves himself with God; and does his God fail him? No, you are the helper of the fatherless: that is, you are the helper of the destitute one, who has none to go to but God. This is a comforting passage, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." He does not say, his ear shall be preserved from the report of evil things, he may hear as sad tidings as other men— but his heart shall be kept from the terror of those tidings; his heart is fixed.

**II. Consult the honor of religion more, and your personal safety less.** Do you think it is for the honor of religion, that Christians should be as timorous as hares, to startle at every sound? Will not this cause the world to think, that whatever you *talk*—yet your principles are no better than other men's? What mischief may the discovery of your fears before them do! It was nobly said by Nehemiah, "Should such a man as I flee?" Were it not better you should die, than that the world should be prejudiced against Christ by your fearful example? For alas! how apt is the world (who judge more by what they see in your *practices*—than by what they understand of your *principles*) to conclude from your timidity, that however much you commend faith and talk of assurance—yet you dare trust to those things no more than they, when it comes to the trial. O let not your fears lay such a stumbling-block before the blind world!

**12. He who would secure his heart from fear, must first secure the eternal interest of his soul—in the hands of Jesus Christ.** When this is done, you may say, 'Now, world—do your worst!' You will not be very solicitous about your vile body—when you are once assured it shall be well to all eternity with your precious soul. "Do not fear those (says Christ) who can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." The assured Christian may smile with contempt upon all his enemies, and say, 'Is this the worst that you can do?' What do you say, Christian? Are you assured that your soul is safe; that immediately upon your death—it shall be received by Christ into an everlasting habitation? If you be sure of that, never trouble yourself about the *instrument* and *means* of your death!

**13. Learn to quench all slavish creature-fears, in the reverential fear of God.**

This is a cure by diversion. It is an exercise of Christian wisdom to turn those passions of the soul which most predominate, into spiritual channels. The Christian must turn natural *anger* into spiritual zeal, natural *mirth* into holy cheerfulness, and natural *fear* into a holy dread and awe of God. This method of cure Christ prescribes in the 10th chapter of Matthew; similar to which is Isaiah, 8:12,13, "Do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it." 'But how shall we help it?' "The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread." Natural fear may be allayed for the present by natural reason, or the removal of the occasion; but then it is like a candle blown out by a puff of breath, which is easily blown in again. But if the fear of God extinguishes it, then it is like a candle quenched in water, which cannot easily be rekindled.

**14. Pour out to God in prayer—those fears which the devil and your own unbelief pour in upon you, in times of danger.**

Prayer is the best outlet to fear! Where is the Christian who cannot set his seal to this direction? I will give you the greatest example to encourage you to compliance, even the example of Jesus Christ. When the hour of his danger and death drew near, he went into the garden, separated from his disciples, and there wrestled mightily with God in prayer, even unto agony; in reference to which the apostle says, "who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears, to him who was able to save from death, and was heard, because he feared." He was heard as to strength and support to carry him through it; though not as to deliverance, or exemption from it. O that these things may abide with you, and be reduced to practice in these evil days—and that many trembling believers may be established by them.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The next season requiring diligence in keeping the heart—  
is the time of OUTWARD NEEDS.** Although at such times we should complain *to* God, not of God, (the throne of grace being erected for a "time of need,") yet when the waters of relief run low, and need begins to press—how prone are the best hearts to distrust the fountain! When the meal in the barrel and the oil in the cruse are almost spent, our faith and patience are almost spent also. It is now difficult to keep the proud and unbelieving heart in a holy quietude and sweet submission at the foot of God. It is an easy thing to talk of trusting God for daily bread, while we have a full barn or purse; but to say as the prophet, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vine; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign Lord is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains!" Habakkuk 3:17-19. Surely this is not easy.

Would you know then how a Christian may keep his heart from distrusting God, or repining against him, when outward needs are either felt or feared? The case deserves to be seriously considered, especially now, since it seems to be the design of Providence to empty the people of God of their creature fullness, and acquaint them with those difficulties to which hitherto they have been altogether strangers. To secure the heart from the dangers attending this condition, these considerations may, through the blessing of the Spirit, prove effectual:

**1. If God reduces you to necessities, he therein deals no otherwise with you, than he has done with some of the holiest men who ever lived.** Your condition is not singular; though you have hitherto been a stranger to need, other saints have been familiarly acquainted with it.

Hear what *Paul* says, not of himself only—but in the name of other saints reduced to like exigencies: "Even to the present hour, *we* both hunger and thirst and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place." To see such a man as Paul going up and down the world naked, and hungry, and homeless; one who was so far above you in grace and holiness; one who did more service for God in a day, than perhaps you have done in all your days—may well put an end to your repining!

Have you forgotten how much even a *David* has suffered? How great were his difficulties? "Give, I pray you", says he to Nabal, "whatever comes to your hand, to your servants, and to your son David." But why do I speak of these? Behold a greater than any of them, even the Son of God, who is the heir of all things, and by whom the worlds were made, sometimes would have been glad for anything, having nothing to eat. "And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry; and seeing a fig-tree afar off, leaving leaves, he came, if perhaps he might find anything thereon."

Hereby then God has set no mark of hatred upon you, neither can you infer lack of love—from lack of bread. When your repining heart puts the question, 'Was there ever sorrow like unto mine?' ask these worthies, and they will tell you that though they did not complain as you do—yet their condition was as necessitous as your is!

**2. Since God leaves you not in this condition without a promise, you have no reason to repine or despond under it.** That is a sad condition indeed to which no promise belongs. Calvin in his comment on Isaiah 9:1, explains in what sense the darkness of the captivity was not so great as that of the lesser incursions made by Tiglath Pileser. In the captivity, the city was destroyed and the temple burnt with fire: there was no comparison in the affliction—yet the darkness was not so great, because, says he, "there was a certain promise made in this case—but none in the other." It is better to be as low as hell with a promise, than to be in paradise without one. Even the darkness of hell itself would be no darkness comparatively at all, were there but a promise to enlighten it.

Now, God has left many sweet promises for the faith of his poor people to live upon in this condition, such as these: "O fear the Lord, you his saints, for there is no lack to those who fear him; the lions lack and suffer hunger—but those who fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing." "The eye of the Lord is upon the righteous—to keep them alive in famine." "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." "He who spared not his own Son—but delivered him up for us all—how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "When the poor and the needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst—I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them." Here you see their extreme needs, water being put for their necessaries of life; and their certain relief, "I the Lord will hear them!" in which it is supposed that they cry unto him in their distress—and he hears their cry. Having therefore these promises, why should not your distrustful heart conclude like David's, "The Lord is my shepherd—I have everything I need!"

'But these promises imply conditions: if they were absolute, they would afford more satisfaction.' What are those tacit conditions of which you speak but these, that he will either supply or sanctify your needs; that you shall have so much as God sees fit for you? And does this trouble you? Would you have the mercy, whether sanctified or not? whether God sees it fit for you or not? The appetites of saints after earthly things would not be so ravenous as to seize greedily upon any enjoyment without regarding circumstances.

'But when needs press, and I see not whence supplies should come, my faith in the promise shakes, and I, like murmuring Israel, cry, "He gave bread, can he give water also?" O unbelieving heart! when did his promises fail? whoever trusted them and was ashamed? May not God upbraid you with your unreasonable infidelity, as in Jer. 2: 31, "Have I been a wilderness unto you?" Or as Christ said to his disciples, "Since I was with you—have you lacked anything?" Yes, may you not upbraid yourself; may you not say with good old Polycarp, "These many years I have served Christ—and found him a good Master!"

Indeed he may deny what your wantonness—but not what your need calls for. He will not regard the cry of your lusts, but he will not despise the cry of your faith: though he will not indulge your wanton appetites—yet he will not violate his own faithful promises. These promises are your best security for eternal life; and it is strange they should not satisfy you for daily bread. Remember the words of the Lord, and solace your heart with them amid all your needs. It is said of Epicurus, that in dreadful paroxysms of the colic he often refreshed himself by calling to mind his inventions in philosophy; and of Possodoniuss the philosopher, that in an acute disorder he solaced himself with discourses on moral virtue; and when distressed, he would say, "O pain, you do nothing; though you are a little troublesome, I will never confess you to be evil." If upon such grounds as these, they could support themselves under such racking pains, and even deluded their diseases by them; how much rather should the promises of God, and the sweet experiences which have gone along step by step with them, make you forget all your needs, and comfort you in every difficulty?

**3. If it is bad now—it might have been worse.** Has God denied you the comforts of this life? He might have denied you Christ, peace, and pardon also; and then your case would have been woeful indeed.

You know God has done so to millions. How many such wretched people may your eyes behold every day, who have no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope; who are miserable here, and will be so to eternity; who have a bitter cup, and nothing to sweeten it—no, not so much as any hope that it will be better. But it is not so with you! Though you are poor in this world—yet you are "rich in faith, and an heir of the kingdom which God has promised." Learn to set *spiritual* riches, over against *temporal* poverty. Balance all your present troubles, with your spiritual privileges. Indeed if God has denied your soul the robe of righteousness to clothe it, the hidden manna to feed it, the heavenly mansion to receive it—you might well be pensive! But the consideration that he has not, may administer comfort under any outward distress. When Luther began to be pressed by need, he said, "Let us be contented with our hard fare; for we feast upon Christ, the bread of life!" "Blessed be God (said Paul) who has abounded to us in all spiritual blessings."

**4. Though this affliction is great, God has far greater afflictions, with which he chastises his dearly beloved ones.** Should he remove this affliction—and inflict those afflictions, you would account your present state a very comfortable one, and bless God to be as you now are. Should God remove your present troubles, supply all your outward needs, give you the desire of your heart in creature-comforts—but hide his face from you, shoot his arrows into your soul, and cause the venom of them to drink up your spirit; should he leave you but a few days to the buffetings of Satan; should he hold your eyes but a few nights waking with horrors of conscience, tossing to and fro until the dawning of the day; should he lead you through the chambers of death, show you the visions of darkness, and make his terrors set themselves in array against you—then tell me if you would not think it a great mercy to be back again in your former necessitous condition, with peace of conscience; and account bread and water, with God's favor—a happy state? O then take heed of repining! Do not say that God deals harshly with you, lest you provoke him to convince you by greater afflictions—that he has worse rods than these for unsubmissive and froward children!

**5. If it is bad now—it will be better shortly.** Keep your heart by this consideration, 'The meal in the barrel is almost gone. Well, be it so, why should that trouble me, if I am almost beyond the need and use of these things?' The traveler has spent almost all his money; 'well,' says he, 'though my money is almost spent, my journey is almost finished too. I am near home, and shall soon be fully supplied.' If there are no candles in the house, it is a comfort to think that it is almost day, and then there will be no need of them. I am afraid, Christian, you misreckon when you think your provision is almost gone, and you have a great way to travel—many years to live and nothing to live upon—it may be not half so many as you suppose! In this be confident, if your provision is gone, either fresh supplies are coming, though you see not whence—or you are nearer your journey's end than you reckon yourself to be. Desponding soul, does it befit a man traveling upon the road to that heavenly city, and almost arrived there, within a few days' journey of his Father's house, where all his needs shall be supplied—to be so anxious about a little food, or drink, or clothes, which he fears he shall need along the way? It was nobly said by the forty martyrs when turned out naked in a frosty night to be starved to death, "The winter indeed is sharp and cold—but heaven is warm and comfortable! Here we shiver for cold—but Abraham's bosom will make amends for all."

'But,' says the desponding soul, 'I may die for lack.' Who ever did so? When were the righteous forsaken? If indeed it is so—your journey is ended—and you will be fully supplied!

'But I am not sure of that; were I sure of heaven, it would be another matter.' Are you not sure of that? Then you have other matters to trouble yourself about than these; methinks these should be the least of all your cares. I do not field that souls perplexed about the lack of Christ, pardon of sin, &c., are usually very solicitous about these things. He who seriously puts such questions as these, 'What shall I do to be saved? how shall I know my sin is pardoned?' does not trouble himself with, "What shall I eat, what shall I drink, or with what shall I be clothed?"

**6. Does it befit the children of such a Father, to distrust his all-sufficiency, or repine at any of his dispensations?** Is it good to question his care and love, upon every new exigency? Say, have you not formerly been ashamed of this? Has not your Father's seasonable provision for you in former difficulties put you to the blush, and made you resolve never more to question his love and care? And yet will you again renew your unworthy suspicions of him? Hypocritical child! Reason thus with yourself: "If I perish for lack of what is good and needful for me, it must be either because my Father *knows* not my needs—or has nothing with which to supply them—or cares not what becomes of me. Which of these shall I charge upon him? Not the first—for my Father knows what I have need of. Not the second—for the earth is the Lords and the fatness thereof, his name is God All-sufficient. Not the last—for as a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him; the Lord is exceeding pitiful and of tender mercy; he hears the young ravens when they cry—and will he not hear me? Consider, says Christ, the birds of the air; not the birds at the door, which are fed every day by band—but the birds of the air which have none to provide for them. Does he feed and clothe his *enemies*—and will he forget his children? he heard even the cry of Ishmael in distress. O my unbelieving heart, do you yet doubt?"

**7. Your poverty is not your sin—but your affliction.** If you have not by sinful means brought it upon yourself, and if it be but an affliction—it may the more easily be borne. It is hard indeed to bear an affliction coming upon us—as the fruit and punishment of sin. When men are under trouble upon that account; they say, 'O if it were but a simple affliction, coming from the hand of God by way of trial, I could bear it; but I have brought it upon myself by sin—it comes as the punishment of my sin—the marks of God's displeasure are upon it—it is the guilt within which troubles and galls, more than the affliction without.' But it is not so here; therefore you have no reason to be cast down under it.

'But though there is no sting of guilt—yet this condition does not lack other stings; as, for instance, the discredit of religion. I cannot comply with my engagements in the world, and thereby religion is likely to suffer.' It is well you have a heart to discharge every duty; yet if God disables you by providence, it is no discredit to your profession that you do not do, that which you cannot do, so long as it is your desire and endeavor to do what you can and ought to do. And in this case God's will is—that mercy and forbearance be exercised toward you.

'But it grieves me to behold the necessities of others, whom I was accustomed to relieve and refresh—but now cannot.' If you cannot, it ceases to be your duty, and God accepts the drawing out of your soul to the hungry in compassion and desire to help them, though you cannot draw forth a full purse to relieve and supply them.

'But I find such a condition full of temptations, a great hindrance in the way to heaven.' Every condition in the world has its hindrances and attending temptations; and were you in a prosperous condition, you might there meet with more temptations and fewer advantages than you now have. For though poverty as well as prosperity has its temptations—yet I am confident prosperity has not those advantages that poverty has. Here you have an opportunity to discover the sincerity of your love to God, when you can live upon him, find enough in him, and constantly follow him—even when all external inducements and motives fail.



Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart from the temptations and dangers attending a low condition in the world. When need oppresses and the heart begins to sink—then improve, and bless God for these helps to keep it.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The next season requiring this diligence in keeping the heart—is the season of pious duties.** Our hearts must be closely watched and kept—when we draw near to God in public, private, or secret duties; for the vanity of the heart seldom reveals itself more than at such times. How often does the poor soul cry out, 'O Lord, how gladly would I serve you—but vain thoughts will not let me! I come to open my heart to you, to delight my soul in communion with you—but my corruptions oppose me! Lord, cast off these vain thoughts, and allow them not to estrange the soul that is espoused to you!'

The question then is this—How may the heart be kept from distractions by vain thoughts in time of duty? There is a **twofold distraction**, or wandering of the heart in duty:

First, **voluntary** and **habitual**, "They set not their hearts aright, and their spirit was not steadfast with God." This is the case of formalists, and it proceeds from the lack of a holy inclination of the heart to God; their hearts are under the power of their lusts, and therefore it is no wonder that they go after their lusts—even when they are about holy things.

Secondly, **involuntary** and **lamented** distractions: "I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me! O wretched man that I am!" etc. This proceeds not from the lack of a holy inclination or aim—but from the weakness of grace and the lack of vigilance in opposing in-dwelling sin. But it is not my business to show you how these distractions come into the heart—but rather how to get them out, and prevent their future admission:

**1. Sequester yourself from all earthly employments, and set apart some time for solemn time to meet God in duty.** You cannot come directly from the world into God's presence without finding *a savor of the world* in your duties. It is with the heart (a few minutes since plunged in the world, now in the presence of God) as it is with the sea after a storm, which still continues working, muddy and disquiet, though the wind is quiet and the storm is over. Your heart must have some time to settle. Few musicians can take an instrument and play upon it without some time and labor to tune it. Few Christians can say with David, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." When you go to God in any duty, take your heart aside and say, 'O my soul, I am now engaged in the greatest work that a creature was ever employed in; I am going into the solemn presence of God upon business of everlasting consequence. O my soul, leave trifling now; be composed, be watchful, be serious; this is no common work, it is soul-work; it is work for eternity; it is work which will bring forth fruit to life or death in the world to come.' Pause awhile and consider your sins, your needs, your troubles; keep your thoughts awhile on these before you address yourself to duty. David first mused—and then spoke with his tongue.

**2. Having composed your heart by previous meditation, immediately set a guard upon your senses.** How often are Christians in danger of losing the eyes of their mind by those of their body! Against this David prayed, "Turn away my eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken me in your way." It were well if you could say in the commencement, as a holy man once said when he came from the performance

of duty: "Be shut, O my eyes, be shut; for it is impossible that you should ever discern such beauty and glory in any creature as I have now seen in God." You must avoid all occasions of distraction from without, and imbibe that intenseness of spirit in the work of God which locks up the eye and ear against vanity.

**3. Beg of God a mortified imagination.** A fertile imagination, however much it is extolled among men, is a great snare to the soul, except it work in fellowship with right reason and a sanctified heart. The imagination is a power of the soul, placed between the senses and the understanding; it is that which first stirs itself in the soul, and by its motions the other powers of the soul are brought into exercise; it is that in which thoughts are first formed, and as that is, so are they. If imaginations are not first cast down, it is impossible that every thought of the heart should be brought into obedience to Christ. The imagination is naturally the wildest and most untamable power of the soul. Some Christians have much to do with it; and the more spiritual the heart is, the more does a wild and vain imagination disturb and perplex it. It is a sad thing that one's imagination should call off the soul from attending on God, when it is engaged in communion with him. Pray earnestly and perseveringly that your imagination may be chastened and sanctified, and when this is accomplished your thoughts will be regular and fixed.

**4. If you would keep your heart from vain excursions when engaged in pious duties, realize to yourself, by faith—the holy and solemn presence of God.** If the presence of a grave man would compose you to seriousness, how much more should the presence of a holy God? Do you think that you would dare to be mirthful and vain, if you realized the presence and inspection of the Divine Being? Remember where you are when engaged in religious duty, and act as if you believed in the omniscience of God. "All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Realize his infinite holiness, his purity, his spirituality.

Strive to obtain such apprehensions of the greatness of God as shall suitably affect your heart, and remember his jealousy over his worship. "This is that the Lord spoke, saying, I will be sanctified in those who come near me, and before all the people I will be glorified." "A man that is praying (says Bernard) should behave himself as if he were entering into the court of heaven, where he sees the Lord upon his throne, surrounded with ten thousand of his angels and saints ministering unto him." When you come from an exercise in which your heart has been wandering and listless, what can you say? Suppose all the vanities and impertinences which have passed through your mind during a devotional exercise were written down and interlined with your petitions. Could you have the audacity to present them to God? Should your tongue utter all the thoughts of your heart when attending the worship of God, would not men abhor you? Yet your thoughts are perfectly known to God! O think upon this scripture: "God is greatly to be feared in the assemblies of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all those who are round about him." Why did the Lord descend in thunderings and lightnings and dark clouds upon Sinai? Why did the mountains smoke under him, the people quake and tremble round about him? but to teach the people this great truth. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire." Such apprehensions of the character and presence of God, will quickly reduce a heart inclined to vanity to a more serious frame.

**5. Maintain a prayerful frame of heart in the intervals of duty.** What reason can be assigned why our hearts are so dull, so careless, so wandering, when we hear or pray—but that there have been long intermissions in our communion with God? If that divine unction, that spiritual fervor, and those holy impressions, which we obtain from God while engaged in the performance of one duty, were preserved to enliven and engage us in the performance of another, they would be of incalculable service to keep our hearts serious and devout. For this purpose, frequent ejaculations between stated and solemn duties are of most excellent use. They not

only preserve the mind in a composed and pious frame—but they connect one stated duty, as it were, with another, and keep the attention of the soul alive to all its interests and obligations.

**6. If you would have the distraction of your thoughts prevented, endeavor to raise your affections to God, and to engage them warmly in your duty.** When the soul is intent upon any work, it gathers in its strength and bends all its thoughts to that work; and when it is deeply affected, it will pursue its object with intenseness, the affections will gain an ascendancy over the thoughts and guide them. But deadness causes distraction, and distraction increases deadness. Could you but regard your duties as the medium in which you might walk in communion with God in which your soul might be filled with those ravishing and matchless delights which his presence affords—you would have no inclination to neglect them. But if you would prevent the recurrence of distracting thoughts, if you would find your happiness in the performance of duty, you must not only be careful that you engage in what is your duty—but labor with patient and persevering exertion, to interest your affections in it. Why is your heart so inconstant, especially in secret duties; why are you ready to be gone, almost as soon as you are come into the presence of God—but because your affections are not engaged?

**7. When you are disturbed by vain thoughts, humble yourself before God, and call in assistance from Heaven.** When the messenger of Satan buffeted Paul by wicked suggestions, (as is supposed) he mourned before God on account of it. Never slight wandering thoughts in duty as small matters; follow every such thought with a deep regret. Turn to God with such words as these: 'Lord, I came here to commune with you, and here a busy adversary and a vain heart, conspiring together, have opposed me. O my God! What a vile heart have I! Shall I never wait upon you without distraction? When shall I enjoy an hour of free communion with you? Grant me your assistance at this you; reveal your glory to me, and my heart will quickly be recovered. I came here to enjoy you, and shall I go away without you? Behold my distress, and help me!' Could you but sufficiently bewail your distractions, and repair to God for deliverance from them—you would gain relief.

**8. Look upon the success and the comfort of your duties, as depending very much upon the keeping of your heart close with God in them.** These two things—the success of duty and the inward comfort arising from the performance of it—are unspeakably dear to the Christian; but both of these will be lost if the heart is in a listless state. "Surely God hears not vanity, nor does the Almighty regard it." The promise is made to a hearty engagement in duties: "Then shall you seek for me, and find me, when you shall search for me with all your hearts." When you find your heart under the power of deadness and distraction, say to yourself, 'O what do I lose by a careless heart now! My praying seasons are the most valuable portions of my life—could I but raise my heart to God, I might now obtain such mercies as would be matter of praise to all eternity.'

**9. Regard your carefulness or carelessness in this matter as a great evidence of your sincerity—or of your hypocrisy.** Nothing will alarm an upright heart more than this. 'What! Shall I give way to a customary wandering of the heart from God? Shall *the spot of the hypocrite* appear upon my soul? Hypocrites, indeed, can drudge on in the round of duty, never regarding the frame of their hearts; but shall I do so? Never— never let me be satisfied with empty duties. Never let me take my leave of a duty until my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!'

**10. It will be of special use to keep your heart with God in duty, to consider what influence all your duties will have upon your eternity.** Your pious seasons are your seed times, and in the eternal world, you must reap the fruits of what you sow in your duties here. If you sow to the flesh—you will reap corruption. If you sow to the Spirit, you will reap everlasting life. Answer seriously these questions:

Are you willing to reap the fruit of vanity in the world to come? Dare you say, when your thoughts are roving to the ends of the earth in duty, when you scarcely mind what you say or hear, 'Now, Lord, I am sowing to the Spirit; now I am providing and laying up for eternity; now I am seeking for glory, honor and immortality; now I am striving to enter in at the strait gate; now I am taking the kingdom of heaven by holy violence!' Such reflections are well calculated to dissipate vain thoughts.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The next season which requires more than commons diligence to keep the heart —is when we receive injuries and abuses from men.** Such is the depravity and corruption of man, that one is become as a wolf or a tiger to another. And as men are naturally cruel and oppressive one to another, so the wicked conspire to abuse and wrong the people of God. "The wicked devours the man who is more righteous than he." Now when we are thus abused and wronged, it is hard to keep the heart from revengeful motions; to make it meekly and quietly commit the cause to Him that judges righteously; to prevent the exercise of any sinful affection. The spirit that is in us lusts to revenge; but it must not be so. We have choice helps in the Gospel to keep our hearts from sinful motions against our enemies, and to sweeten our embittered spirits. Do you ask how a Christian may keep his heart from revengeful motions under the greatest injuries and abuses from men? I reply— When you find your heart begin to be inflamed by revengeful feelings, immediately reflect on the following things:

**1. Urge upon your heart the severe prohibitions of revenge contained in the Word of God.** However gratifying to your corrupt propensities revenge may be, remember that it is forbidden. Hear the word of God: "Say not, I will recompense evil." Say not, I will do so to him as he has done to me. "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written—It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary—If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." It was an argument urged by the Christians to prove their religion to be supernatural and pure—that it forbids revenge, which is so agreeable to nature. Awe your heart, then, with the authority of God in the Scriptures; and when carnal reason says, 'My enemy deserves to be hated!' Let conscience reply, 'But does God deserve to be disobeyed?' 'Thus and thus has he done, and so has he wronged me.' 'But what has God done that I should wrong him? If my enemy dares boldly to break my peace, shall I be so wicked as to break God's precept? If he fears not to wrong me, shall not I fear to wrong God?' Thus let the fear of God restrain and calm your feelings.

**2. Set before your eyes the most eminent patterns of meekness and forgiveness, that you may feel the force of their example.** This is the way to cut off the common pleas of flesh and blood for revenge, as thus, 'No man would bear such an affront!' Yes—others have borne as bad, and worse ones! 'But I shall be reckoned a coward, a fool, if I pass this by!' That is no concern to you, so long as you follow the examples of the wisest and holiest of men. Never did anyone suffer more or greater abuses from men than **Jesus** did, nor did anyone ever endure insult and reproach and every kind of abuse in a more peaceful and forgiving manner. When he was reviled—he reviled not again; when he suffered—he threatened not; when his murderers crucified him—he asked the Father to forgive them. Herein he has set us an example, that we should follow his steps. Thus his apostles imitated him: "When we are cursed—we bless; when we are persecuted—we endure it; when we are slandered—we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world."

I have often heard it reported of the holy Mr. Dod, that when a man, enraged at his searching, convincing doctrine, assaulted him, smote him on the face and dashed

out two of his teeth; that meek servant of Christ spit out the teeth and blood into his hand, and said, "See here, you have knocked out two of my teeth, and that without any just provocation; but on condition that I might do your soul good, I would give you permission to knock out all the rest." Here was exemplified the excellency of the Christian spirit. Strive then for this spirit, which constitutes the true excellence of Christians. Do what others cannot do, keep this spirit in exercise, and you will preserve peace in your own soul and gain the victory over your enemies.

**2. Consider the character of the person who has wronged you.** He is either a godly man or a wicked man. If he is a godly man, there is light and tenderness in his conscience, which sooner or later will bring him to a sense of the evil of what he has done. If he is a godly man, Christ has forgiven him greater injuries than he has done to you; and why should not you forgive him? Will Christ not upbraid him for any of his wrongs—but frankly forgive them all; and will you take him by the throat for some petty abuse which he has done to you?

**3. But if a wicked man has injured or insulted you, truly you have more reason to exercise pity than revenge toward him.** He is in a deluded and miserable state; a slave to sin and an enemy to righteousness. If he should ever repent, he will be ready to make you reparation; if he continues impenitent, there is a day coming when he will be punished to the extent of his deserts. You need not study revenge, God will execute vengeance upon him.

**4. Remember that by revenge you can only gratify a sinful passion, which by forgiveness you might conquer.** Suppose that by revenge you might destroy one enemy; yet, by exercising the Christian's temper you might conquer three enemies at once—your own lust, Satan's temptation, and your enemy's heart. If by revenge you should overcome your enemy, the victory would be unhappy and inglorious, for in gaining it you would be overcome by your own corruption; but by exercising a meek and forgiving temper, you will always come off with honor and success. It must be a very vile person indeed, upon which meekness and forgiveness will not operate. That must be a flinty heart, which this fire will not melt. Thus David gained such a victory over Saul his persecutor, that "Saul lifted up his voice and wept, and he said to David, You are more righteous than I."

**5. Seriously propose this question to your own heart: 'Have I got any good to my soul—by means of the wrongs and injuries which I have received?'** If they have done you no good, turn your revenge upon yourself. You have reason to be filled with shame and sorrow that you should have a heart which can deduce no good from such troubles; that your temper should be so unlike that of Christ. The patience and meekness of other Christians, have turned all the injuries offered to them to a good account! Their souls have been animated to praise God, when they have been loaded with reproaches from the world. "I thank my God," said Jerome, "that I am worthy to be hated of the world." But if you have derived any benefit from the reproaches and wrongs which you have received, if they have put you upon examining your own heart, if they have made you more careful how you conduct your life, if they have convinced you of the value of a sanctified temper—will you not forgive them? Will you not forgive one who has been instrumental of so much good to you? What though he meant it for evil? If through the Divine blessing your happiness has been promoted by what he has done—why should you even have a hard thought of him?

**6. Consider by whom all your troubles are ordered.** This will be of great use to keep your heart from revenge; this will quickly calm and sweeten your temper. When Shimei railed at *David* and cursed him, the spirit of that godly man was not at all poisoned by revenge; for when Abishai offered him, if he pleased, the head of Shimei; the king said, "Let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him, Curse David: who shall then say, Why have you done so?" It may be that God uses him as

his rod to chastise me, because by my sin I gave the enemies of God occasion to blaspheme; and shall I be angry with the instrument? How irrational were that! Thus *Job* was quieted; he did not rail and meditate revenge upon the Chaldeans and Sabeans—but regarded God as the orderer of his troubles, and said, "The *Lord* has taken away, blessed be his name."

**7. Consider how *you* are daily and hourly wronging God—and you will not be so easily inflamed with revenge against those who have wronged you.** You are constantly affronting God—yet he does not take vengeance on you—but bears with you and forgives; and will you rise up and avenge yourself upon others? Reflect on this cutting rebuke: "O you wicked and slothful servant! I forgave you all that debt because you asked me; should you not also have compassion on your fellow-servant, even as I had pity on you?" None should be so filled with forbearance and mercy to such as wrong them—as those who have experienced the riches of mercy themselves! **The mercy of God to us—should melt our hearts into mercy toward others.** It is impossible that we should be cruel to others—unless we forget how kind and compassionate God has been to us. And if kindness cannot prevail in us, methinks fear should, "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

**8. Let the consideration that the day of the Lord draws near, restrain you from anticipating it by acts of revenge.** Why are you so hasty? Is not the Lord at hand to avenge all his abused servants? "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!" Vengeance belongs unto God, and will you wrong yourself so much as to assume his work?



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**The next season in which special exertion is necessary to keep the heart—is when we meet with great TRIALS.** In such cases the heart is apt to be suddenly transported with pride, impatience, or other sinful passions. Many good people are guilty of hasty and very sinful conduct in such instances. We all have need to use diligently the following means to keep our hearts submissive and patient under great trials:

**1. Get humble and abasing thoughts of yourself.** The *humble* man, is ever the *patient* man. Pride is the source of irregular and sinful passions. A lofty spirit, will be an unyielding and peevish spirit. When we overrate ourselves—we think that we are treated unworthily, that our trials are too severe—thus we cavil and repine. Christian, you should have such thoughts of yourself as would put a stop to these murmurings. You should have lower and more humiliating views of yourself than any other one can have of you! Get humility—and you will have peace, whatever your trial is!

**2. Cultivate a habit of communion with God.** This will prepare you for whatever may take place. This will so sweeten your temper and calm your mind as to secure you against surprises. This will produce that inward peace which will make you superior to your trials. Habitual communion with God will afford you enjoyment, which you can never be willing to interrupt by sinful feeling. When a Christian is calm and submissive under his afflictions—probably he derives support and comfort in this way; but he who is discomposed, impatient, or fretful—shows that all is not right within—he cannot be supposed to practice communion with God.

**3. Let your mind be deeply impressed with an apprehension of the evil nature of an unsubmitive and restless temper, and effects of an unsubmitive and restless temper.** It grieves the Spirit of God, and induces his departure. His gracious presence and influence are enjoyed only where peace and quiet submission prevail. The indulgence of such a temper gives the adversary an advantage. Satan is an angry and discontented spirit. He finds no rest but in restless hearts. He bestirs himself when the spirits are in commotion; sometimes he fills the heart with ungrateful and rebellious thoughts; sometimes he inflames the tongue with indecent language. Again, such a temper brings great guilt upon the conscience, unfits the soul for any duty, and dishonors the Christian name. O keep your heart, and let the power and excellence of your religion be chiefly manifested when you are brought into the greatest straits.

**4. Consider how desirable it is for a Christian to overcome his evil propensities.** How much more present happiness it affords; how much better it is in every respect to mortify and subdue unholy feelings, than to give way to them. When upon your deathbed you come calmly to review your life, how comfortable will it be to reflect on the conquest which you have made over the depraved feelings of your heart. It was a memorable saying of Valentinian the emperor, when he was about to die: "Among all my conquests, there is but one that now comforts me." Being asked what that was, he answered, "I have overcome my worst enemy—my own sinful heart!"

**5. Shame yourself, by contemplating the character of those who have been most eminent for meekness and submission.** Above all, compare your temper with the Spirit of Christ. "Learn of me," says he, "for I am meek and lowly." It is said of Calvin and Ursin, though both of irascible natures, that they had so imbibed and cultivated the meekness of Christ as not to utter an unfitting word under the greatest provocations. And even many of the heathens have manifested great moderation and forbearance under their severest afflictions. Is it not a shame and a reproach that you should be outdone by them?

**6. Avoid everything which is calculated to irritate your feelings.** It is true spiritual valor to keep as far as we can out of sin's way. If you can but avoid the excitements to impetuous and rebellious feelings, or check them in their first beginnings, you will have but little to fear. The first workings of common sins are comparatively weak, they gain their strength by degrees; but in times of trial the motions of sin are strongest at first, the unsubdued temper breaks out suddenly and violently. But if you resolutely withstand it at first—it will yield and give you the victory!

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
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Proverbs 4:23

## **The next season wherein the greatest diligence and skill are necessary to keep the heart—is the hour of TEMPTATION,**

when Satan besets the Christian's heart, and takes the unwary by surprise. To keep the heart at such times, is not less a *mercy* than a *duty*. Few Christians are so skillful in detecting the fallacies, and repelling the arguments by which the adversary incites them to sin, as to come off safe and whole in these encounters. Many eminent saints have smarted severely for their lack of watchfulness and diligence at such times. How then may a Christian keep his heart from yielding to temptation? There are several principal ways in which the adversary insinuates temptation, and urges compliance:

**1. Satan suggests that here is *pleasure to be enjoyed—the temptation is presented with a smiling aspect and an enticing voice!*** 'What, are you so dull and stolid as not to feel the powerful charms of pleasure? Who can withhold himself from such delights?' Reader, you may be rescued from the danger of such temptations by repelling the first proposal of pleasure. It is urged that the commission of sin will afford you pleasure. Suppose this were true, will the accusing and condemning rebukes of conscience and the flames of hell be pleasant too? Is there pleasure in the scourges of conscience? If so, why did Peter weep so bitterly? Why did David cry out of broken bones?

You hear what is said of the *pleasure* of sin, and have you not read what David said of the *effects* of it? "Your arrows stick fast in me, and your hand presses me sore; there is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin," etc. If you yield to temptation, you must feel such inward distress on account of it—or the miseries of hell! But why should the pretended pleasure of sin allure you, when you know that unspeakably more real pleasure will arise from the *mortification* of sin—than can arise from the *commission* of sin! Will you prefer the gratification of some unhallowed passion, with the deadly poison which it will leave behind—to that sacred pleasure which arises from hearing and obeying God, complying with the dictates of conscience, and maintaining inward peace? Can sin afford any such delight as he feels who, by resisting temptation, has manifested the sincerity of his heart, and obtained evidence that he fears God, loves holiness, and hates sin?

**2. The *secrecy* with which you may commit sin is made use of, to induce compliance with temptation.** The tempter insinuates that this indulgence will never disgrace you among men, for no one will know it. But recollect yourself. Does not *God* behold you? Is not the divine presence everywhere? What if you might hide your sin from the eyes of the world, you cannot hide it from God. No darkness can screen you from his inspection. Besides, have you no respect for yourself? Can you do that by yourself, which you dare not have others observe? Is not your conscience as a thousand witnesses? Even a heathen could say, "When you are tempted to commit sin, fear yourself without any other witness."

**3. The prospect of *worldly advantage* often enforces temptation.** It is suggested, 'Why should you be so precise and scrupulous? Give yourself a little liberty, and you may better your condition: now is your time.' This is a dangerous temptation, and must be promptly resisted. Yielding to such a temptation will do your soul more injury than any temporal acquisition can possibly do you good. And what would it

profit you, if you should gain the whole world and lose your own soul? What can be compared with the value of your spiritual interests? Or what can at all compensate for the smallest injury of them?

**4. Perhaps the *smallness of the sin is urged as a reason why you may commit it.***

"It is but a little sin, a small matter, a trifle!" But is the Majesty of heaven little too? If you commit this sin you will offend a great God! Is there any little hell to torment little sinners in? No! the least sinners in hell are full of misery. There is great wrath treasured up for those whom the world regard as *little sinners*. But the less the sin, the less the inducement to commit it. Will you provoke God for a trifle? Will you destroy your peace, wound your conscience, and grieve the Spirit—all for nothing? What madness is this!

**5. An argument to enforce temptation is sometimes drawn from the *mercy of God and the hope of pardon.***

"God is merciful, he will pass by this as an infirmity, he will not be severe to mark it." But stop! Where do you find a promise of mercy to presumptuous sinners? Involuntary falls and lamented infirmities may be pardoned, "but the soul that does anything presumptuously, the same reproaches the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people." If God is a being of so much mercy—how can you affront him? How can you make so glorious an attribute as the divine mercy, into an occasion of sin? Will you wrong God because he is good? Rather let his goodness lead you to repentance, and keep you from transgression.

**6. Sometimes Satan encourages to the commission of sin, from the examples of *holy men.***

"Thus and thus they sinned, and were restored; therefore you may commit this sin, and yet be a saint and be saved." Such suggestions must be instantly repelled. If good men have committed sins similar to that with which you are beset, did any good man ever sin upon such ground and from such encouragement as is here presented? Did God cause their examples to be recorded for your *imitation*, or for your warning? Are they not set up as *beacons* that you may avoid the rocks upon which they split? Are you willing to feel what they felt for sin? Dare you follow them in sin, and plunge yourself into such distress and danger as they incurred?

Reader, in these ways learn to keep your heart in the hour of temptation.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

## **The time of doubting and of spiritual darkness—constitutes another season when it is very difficult to keep the heart.**

When the light and comfort of the divine presence is withdrawn; when the believer, from the prevalence of indwelling sin in one form or other, is ready to renounce his hopes, to infer desperate conclusions with respect to himself, to regard his former comforts as vain delusions, and his professions as hypocrisy; at such a time much diligence is necessary to keep the heart from despondency. The Christian's distress arises from his apprehension of his spiritual state, and in general he argues against his possessing true religion, either from his having relapsed into the same sins from which he had formerly been recovered with shame and sorrow; or from the sensible declining of his affections from God; or from the strength of his affections toward creature enjoyments; or from his enlargement in public, while he is often confined and barren in private duties; or from some horrible suggestions of Satan, with which his soul is greatly perplexed; or, lastly, from God's silence and seeming denial of his long depending prayers. Now in order to the establishment and support of the heart under these circumstances, it is necessary that you be acquainted with some general truths which have a tendency to calm the trembling and doubting soul; and that you be rightly instructed with regard to the above-mentioned causes of disquiet. Let me direct your attention to the following general truths:

**1. Every appearance of hypocrisy does not prove the person who manifests it, to be a hypocrite.** You should carefully distinguish between the *appearance* and the *predominance* of hypocrisy. There are remains of deceitfulness in the best hearts; this was exemplified in David and Peter—but the prevailing frame of their hearts being upright, they were not denominated hypocrites for their conduct.

**2. We ought to regard what can be said in our favor, as well as what may be said against us.** It is the sin of upright people sometimes, to exercise an unreasonable severity against themselves. They do not impartially consider the state of their souls. To make their state appear better than it really is, indeed is the damning sin of self-flattering hypocrites; and to make their state appear worse than it really is, is the sin and folly of some good people. But why should you be such an enemy to your own peace? Why read over the evidences of God's love to your soul, as a man does a book which he intends to confute? Why do you study evasions, and turn off those comforts which are due to you?

**3. Everything which may be an occasion of grief to the people of God, is not a sufficient ground for their questioning the reality of their religion.** Many things may *trouble* you—which ought not to *stumble* you. If upon every occasion you should call in question all that had ever been wrought upon you, your life would be made up of doubting and fears, and you could never attain that settled inward peace, and live that life of praise and thankfulness which the Gospel requires.

**4. The soul is not at all times in a suitable state to pass a right judgment upon itself.** It is peculiarly unqualified for this in the labor of desertion or temptation. Such seasons must be improved rather for watching and resisting, than for judging and determining.

**5. Whatever be the ground of one's distress, it should drive him to, not from God.** Suppose you have sinned thus and so, or that you have been thus long and sadly deserted—yet you have no right to infer that you ought to be discouraged, as if there was no help for you in God.

When you have well digested these truths, if your doubts and distress remain, consider what is now to be offered:

**1. Are you ready to conclude that you have no part in the favor of God—because you are visited with some extraordinary affliction?** If so, do you then rightly conclude that great trials are tokens of God's hatred? Does the Scripture teach this? And dare you infer the same with respect to all who have been as much or more afflicted than yourself? If the argument is good in your case, it is good in application to theirs, and more conclusive with respect to them, in proportion as their trials were greater than yours. Woe then to David, Job, Paul, and all who have been afflicted as they were! But had you passed along in quietness and prosperity; had God withheld those chastisements with which he ordinarily visits his people, would you not have had far more reason for doubts and distress than you now have?

**2. Do you rashly infer that the Lord has no love to you, because he has withdrawn the light of his countenance?** Do you imagine your state to be hopeless, because it is dark and uncomfortable? Be not hasty in forming this conclusion. If any of the dispensations of God to his people will bear a favorable as well as a harsh construction, why should they not be construed in the best sense? And may not God have a design of love rather than of hatred in the dispensation under which you mourn? May he not depart for a *season*, without departing *forever*? You are not the first who has mistaken the design of God in withdrawing himself. "Zion says, the Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me." But was it so? What says the answer of God? "Can a woman forget her nursing child?" etc.

But do you sink down under the apprehension that the evidences of a total and final desertion are discoverable in your experience? Have you then lost your conscientious tenderness with regard to sin? And are you inclined to forsake God? If so, you have reason indeed to be alarmed! But if your conscience is tenderly alive; if you are resolved to cleave to the Lord; if the language of your heart is, "I cannot forsake God, I cannot live without his presence! Though he slays me—yet will I trust in him!" Then you have reason to hope that he will visit you again. It is by these exercises that he still maintains his interest in you.

Once more. Are sense and feelings suitable to judge of the dispensations of God by? Can their testimony be safely relied on? Is it safe to argue thus: 'If God had any love for my soul, I would feel it now as well as in former times; but I cannot feel it, therefore it is gone?' May you not as well conclude, when the sun is invisible to you, that it has ceased to exist? Read Isaiah 1: 10.

Now if there is nothing in the divine dealings with you which is a reasonable ground of your despondency and distress, let us inquire what there is in your own conduct, for which you should be so cast down:

**1. Have you committed sins from which you were formerly recovered with shame and sorrow?** And do you thence conclude that you sin allowedly and habitually, and that your oppositions to sin were hypocritical? But do not too hastily give up all for lost. Is not your repentance and care renewed as often as you commit sin? Is it not the sin itself which troubles you, and is it not true, that the oftener you sin the more you are distressed? It is not so in *customary* sinning; of which Bernard excellently discourses thus: "When a man accustomed to restrain, sins grievously, it seems insupportable to him, yes he seems to descend alive into hell. In process of time it seems not insupportable—but heavy, and between insupportable and heavy

there is no small descent. Next, such sinning becomes light, his conscience smites but faintly, and he regards not her rebukes. Then he is not only insensible to his guilt—but that which was bitter and displeasing has become in some degree sweet and pleasant. Now it is made a custom, and not only pleases him—but pleases him habitually. At length custom becomes habitual and natural; he cannot be dissuaded from it—but defends and pleads for it." This is allowed and customary sinning, this is the way of the wicked. But is not your way the contrary of this?

**2. Do you apprehend a decline of your affections from God and from spiritual subjects?** This may be your case, and yet there may be hope. But possibly you are mistaken with regard to this. There are many things to be learned in Christian experience; it has relation to a great variety of subjects. You may now be learning what it is very necessary for you to know as a Christian. Now, what if you are not sensible of so lively affections, of such ravishing views as you had at first; may not your piety be growing more solid and consistent, and better adapted to practical purposes? Does it follow from your not always being in the same frame of mind, or from the fact that the same objects do not at all times excite the same feelings—that you have no true religion? Perhaps you deceive yourself by looking forward to what you *should* be—rather than contemplating what you *are*, compared with what you once *were*.

**3. If the strength of your love to creature-enjoyments is the ground of desperate conclusions respecting yourself,** perhaps you argue thus: "I fear that I love the creature more than God; if so, I have not true love to God. I sometimes feel stronger affections toward earthly comforts than I do toward heavenly objects; therefore my soul is not upright within me." If, indeed, you love the creature for itself, if you make it your end, and religion but a means, then you conclude rightly; for this is incompatible with supreme love to God. But may not a man love God more ardently and unchangeably than he does anything, or all things else, and yet, when God is not the direct object of his thoughts, may he not be sensible of more violent affection for the creature than he has at that time for God? As rooted malice indicates a stronger hatred than sudden though more violent passion; so we must judge of our love, not by a violent motion of it now and then—but by the depth of its root and the constancy of its exercise. Perhaps your difficulty results from bringing your love to some foreign and improper test. Many people have feared that when brought to some eminent trial, they would renounce Christ and cleave to the creature; but when the trial came, Christ was everything, and the world as nothing in their esteem. Such were the fears of some martyrs whose victory was complete. But you may expect divine assistance only at the time of, and in proportion to your necessity. If you would test your love, see whether you are willing to forsake Christ now.

**4. Is the lack of that enlargement in private, which you find in public exercises, an occasion of doubts and fears?** Consider then whether there are not some circumstances attending public duties which are peculiarly calculated to excite your feelings and elevate your mind, and which cannot affect you in private. If so, your exercises in secret, if performed faithfully and in a suitable manner, may be profitable, though they have not all the characteristics of those in public. If you imagine that you have spiritual enlargement and enjoyment in public exercises while you neglect private duties, doubtless you deceive yourself. Indeed if you live in the neglect of secret duties, or are careless about them, you have great reason to fear. But if you regularly and faithfully perform them, it does not follow that they are vain and worthless, or that they are not of great value, because they are not attended with so much enlargement as you sometimes find in public. And what if the Spirit is pleased more highly to favor you with his gracious influence in one place and at one time than another; should this be a reason for murmuring and unbelief, or for thankfulness?

**5. The vile or blasphemous suggestions of Satan sometimes occasion great perplexity and distress.** They seem to lay open an abyss of corruption in the heart, and to say there can be no grace here. But there may be grace in the heart where such thoughts are injected, though not in the heart which consents to and nourishes them. Do you then abhor and oppose them? Do you utterly refuse to give up yourself to their influence, and strive to keep holy and reverend thoughts of God, and of all pious objects? If so, such suggestions are involuntary, and no evidence against your piety.

**6. Is the seeming denial of your prayers, an occasion of despondency?** Are you disposed to say, "If God had any regard for my soul he would have heard my petitions before now; but I have no answer from him, and therefore no saving interest in him?" But stop! Though God's abhorring and finally rejecting prayer is an evidence that he rejects the person who prays—yet, dare you conclude that he has rejected you, because an answer to your prayers is delayed, or because you do not discover it if granted? "May not God bear long with his own elect, who cry unto him day and night?"

Others have stumbled upon the same ground with you: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before your eyes: nevertheless you heard the voice of my supplication." Now are there not some things in your experience which indicate that your prayers are not rejected, though answer to them is deferred? Are you not disposed to continue praying though you do not discover an answer? Are you not disposed still to ascribe righteousness to God, while you consider the cause of his silence as being in yourself? Thus did David: "O my God, I cry in the day time, and you hear not; and in the night, and am not silent: but you are holy," etc. Does not the delay of an answer to your prayers excite you to examine your own heart and test your ways, that you may find and remove the difficulty? If so, you may have reason for humiliation—but not for despair.

Thus I have shown you how to keep your heart in dark and doubting seasons. God forbid that any false heart should encourage itself from these things. It is lamentable, that when we give saints and sinners their proper portions—each is so prone to take up the other's portion!



"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

## **Another season wherein the heart must be kept with all diligence—is when sufferings for Christ sake are laid upon**

**us.** Blessed is the man who in such a season is not offended in Christ. Now, whatever may be the kind or degree of your sufferings, if they are sufferings for Christ's sake and the Gospel's, spare no diligence to keep your heart. If you are tempted to shrink or waver under them, let what follows help you to repel and to surmount the instigation:

**1. What reproach would you cast upon the Redeemer and his religion by deserting him at such a time as this!** You would proclaim to the world, that however much you have boasted of the promises, when you are put to the proof—you dare hazard nothing upon them; and this will give the enemies of Christ an occasion to blaspheme. And will you thus furnish the heathen with triumph? Ah, if you did but value the name of Christ as much as many wicked men value their names, you could never endure that his should be exposed to contempt. Will proud dust and ashes hazard death or hell rather than have their names disgraced; and will you endure nothing to maintain the honor of Christ?

**2. Dare you violate your conscience out of complaisance to flesh and blood?** Who will comfort you when your conscience accuses and condemns you? What happiness can there be in life, liberty or friends—when inward peace is taken away? Consider well what you do.

**3. Is not the public interest of Christ and his cause infinitely more important than any interest of your own, and should you not prefer his glory and the welfare of his kingdom before everything else?** Should any temporary suffering, or any sacrifice which you can be called to make, be allowed to come into competition with the honor of his name?

**4. Did the Redeemer neglect your interest and think lightly of you, when for your sake he endured sufferings?** Between your sufferings and His—there can be no comparison. Did he hesitate and shrink back? No! "He endured the cross, despising the shame." Did he with unbroken patience and constancy endure so much for you—and will you flinch from momentary suffering in his cause?

**5. Can you so easily cast off the society and the privileges of the saints and go over to the enemy's side?** Are you willing to withhold your support from those who are determined to persevere, and throw your influence in the scale against them? Rather let your body and soul be rent asunder! "If any man draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

**6. How can you stand before Christ in the day of judgment, if you desert him now?** "He who is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." In a little while, the Son of man will come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, to judge the world. He will sit upon the throne of judgment, while all the nations are brought before him. Imagine yourself now to be witnessing the transactions of that day. Behold the wicked; behold the apostates; and hear the dreadful sentence which is pronounced upon them, and see them sinking in the gulf of infinite and everlasting woe! And will you

desert Christ now, will you forsake his cause to save a little suffering, or to protract an unprofitable life on earth—and thus expose yourself to the doom of the apostate? Remember, that if you can silence the remonstrances of conscience now—you cannot hinder the sentence of the Judge then! By these means keep your heart, that it depart not from the living God.

"Keep your heart with all diligence;  
for out of it are the issues of life."  
Proverbs 4:23

**The last season which I shall mention, in which the heart must be kept with all diligence—is when we are warned by SICKNESS that our death is at hand.**

When the child of God draws near to eternity, the adversary makes his last effort; and as he cannot win the soul from God, as he cannot dissolve the bond which unites the soul to Christ—his great design is to awaken fears of death, to fill the mind with aversion and horror at the thoughts of dissolution from the body. Hence, what shrinking from a separation, what fear to grasp death's cold hand, and unwillingness to depart—may sometimes be observed in the people of God. But we ought to *die*, as well as *live*—like saints!

I shall offer several considerations calculated to help the people of God in time of sickness, to keep their hearts loose from all earthly objects, and cheerfully willing to die:

**1. Death is harmless to the people of God.** Death's arrows have no sting in them. Why then are you afraid that your sickness may be unto death? If you were to die in your sins; if death were to reign over you as a tyrant, to feed upon you as a lion does upon his prey; if death to you were to be the precursor of hell—then you might reasonably startle and shrink back from it with horror and dismay! But if your sins are blotted out; if Christ has vanquished death in your behalf, so that you have nothing to encounter but bodily pain, and possibly not even that; if death will be to you the harbinger of heaven—why should you be afraid? Why not bid death welcome? Death cannot hurt you! It is easy and harmless; it is like putting off your clothes, of taking rest.

**2. It may keep your heart from shrinking back, to consider that death is necessary to fit you for the full enjoyment of God.** Whether you are willing to die or not, there certainly is no other way to complete the happiness of your soul. Death must do you the kind office to remove this veil of flesh, this carnal life which separates you from God, before you can see and enjoy him fully. "While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." And who would not be willing to die for the perfect enjoyment of God? Methinks one would look and sigh, like a prisoner, through the grates of this mortality: "O that I had wings like a dove—then I would fly away and be at rest!" Indeed most men need patience to die; but a saint, who understands what death will introduce him to, rather needs patience to live. On his deathbed he should often look out and listen to his Lord's coming; and when he perceives his death to be near, he should say, "The voice of my Beloved! Behold He comes leaping over the mountains, skipping over the hills!"

**3. Consider that the happiness of heaven commences immediately after death.** That happiness will not be deferred until the resurrection; but as soon as death has passed upon you, your soul will be swallowed up in bliss. When you have once loosed from this earthly shore, you shall be quickly wafted to the shore of a glorious eternity. And can you not say—I desire to die, and to be with Christ? Did the soul and body die together, or did they sleep until the resurrection, as some have fancied, it would have been folly for Paul to desire death for the enjoyment of Christ; because he would have enjoyed more in the body than he could have enjoyed out of it.

The Scripture speaks of but two ways in which the soul can properly live: that is, by faith and vision. These two comprehend its present and future existence. Now, if when faith fails, and sight should not immediately follow—what would become of the soul? But the truth on this subject is clearly revealed in Scripture. See Luke 23: 3; John 14: 3, etc. What a blessed change then, will death make in your condition! Rouse up, dying saint, and rejoice; let death do his work, that the angels may conduct your soul to the world of light.

**4. It may increase your willingness to die, to reflect that by death God often removes his people out of the way of great troubles and temptations.** When some extraordinary calamity is coming upon the world, God sometimes removes his saints out of the way of the evil. Thus Methuselah died the year before the flood; Augustine died a little before the sacking of Hippo. Pareus died just before the taking of Heidelberg. Luther observes that all the apostles died before the destruction of Jerusalem; and Luther himself died before the wars broke out in Germany. How it may be that by death you will escape some grievous trial, which you *could* not and *need* not endure. But if no extraordinary trouble would come upon you in case your life were prolonged—yet God desires by death, to relieve you from innumerable evils and burdens which are inseparable from the present earthly state. Thus you will be delivered from indwelling sin, which is the greatest trouble; from all temptations from whatever source; from bodily pains and failing; and from all the afflictions and sorrows of this life. The days of your mourning will be ended, and God Himself will wipe away all tears from your eyes. Why then should you not hasten to die?

**5. If you still linger, like Lot in Sodom, what are your pleas and pretenses for a longer life?** Why are you unwilling to die? Are you concerned for the welfare of your relations? If so, are you anxious for their temporal support? Then let the word of God satisfy you: "Leave your fatherless children to me—I will keep them alive, and let your widows trust in me." Luther says, in his last will, "Lord, you have given me a wife and children, I have nothing to leave them—but I commit them unto you. O Father of the fatherless, and Judge of widows—nourish, keep and teach them."

But are you concerned for the spiritual welfare of your relations? Remember that *you* cannot convert them, even if you should live. Remember that God can make your prayers and counsels effectual when you are dead.

Perhaps you desire to serve God longer in this world. But if he has nothing further for you to do here, why not say with David, "Here am I—let him do what seems good to him." He is calling you to *higher* service in heaven, and can accomplish by other hands what you desire to do further here on earth. Do you feel too imperfect to go to heaven? Consider that you must be imperfect until you die; your sanctification cannot be complete until you get to heaven.

'But,' you say, 'I lack assurance; if I had that, I could die easily.' Consider, then, that a hearty willingness to leave all the world to be freed from sin, and to be with God, is the direct way to that desired assurance; no carnal person was ever willing to die upon this ground.

**Thus I have shown how the people of God, in the most difficult seasons—may keep their hearts with all diligence.**

**I now proceed to improve and APPLY the subject.**

# I now proceed to improve and APPLY the subject

You have seen that the keeping of the heart is the great work of a Christian, in which the very soul and life of true religion consists, and without which all other duties are of no value in the sight of God. Hence, to their consternation, I give **a special warning to hypocrites and formal professors—that the pains and labors which they have undergone in religion are of no value, and will turn to no good account.** Many splendid religious services have been performed by men, which God will utterly reject! They will not stand on record in order to an eternal acceptance, because the performers took no heed to keep their hearts with God. This is that fatal rock on which thousands of vain professors dash and ruin themselves eternally! They are exact about the *externals* of religion—but heedless of their *hearts!* O how many hours have some professors spent in hearing, praying, reading and conferring! And yet, as to the main end of piety, they might as well have sat still and done nothing—as the great work, I mean heart-work, was all the while neglected. Tell me, vain professor, when did you shed a tear for the deadness, hardness, unbelief or earthliness of your heart? And do you think your easy, heartless religion can save you? If so, you must invert Christ's words, and say, "*Wide* is the gate and *broad* is the way that leads to life, and *many* there are who enter." Hear me, you self-deluding hypocrite; you who have put off God with heartless duties—you who have acted as if you had been worshiping an idol! You who could not search your heart, and regulate it, and exercise it in your performances; how will you abide the coming of the Lord? how will you hold up your head before him, when he shall say. "O you shamming, false-hearted man! How could you profess to worship me—without your heart? With what face could you so often tell me that you loved me, when you knew in your conscience that your heart was not with me?" O tremble to think what a fearful judgment it is to be given over to a heedless and careless heart, and then to have *mere religious duties*, instead of a rattle, to quiet and still the conscience!

**I infer for their humiliation, that unless the people of God spend more time and pains about their hearts than they ordinarily do—they are never likely to do God much service, or to possess much comfort in this world.** I may say of that Christian who is remiss and careless in keeping his heart, as Jacob said of Reuben, "you shall not excel." It grieves me to see how many Christians there are who live at a poor, low rate—both of service and comfort, and who go up and down dejected and complaining. But how can they expect it should be otherwise, while they live so carelessly? O how little of their time is spent in the closet, in searching, humbling, and quickening their hearts!

Christian, you say your heart is dead, and do you wonder that it is, so long as you do not nourish it with the fountain of life? If your body had been as starved as your soul has—that would have been dead too. And you may never expect that your heart will be in a better state—until you take more pains with it.

O Christians! I fear your zeal and strength have run in the wrong chapel; I fear that most of us may take up the Church's complaint: "They have made me the keeper of the vineyards—but my own vineyard have I not kept!" Two things have eaten up the time and strength of the professors of this generation, and sadly diverted them from heart-work.

First. **Fruitless controversies, started by Satan, have greatly increased the neglect of our hearts.** Satan's purpose in fruitless controversies, is to take us off from practical godliness, and to make us puzzle our heads—when we should be inspecting our hearts. How little have we regarded the observation: "It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, and not with meats," (that is, with disputes and controversies about meats,) "which have not profited those who have been occupied therein." How much better it is to see men live exactly—than to hear them dispute with subtlety! These *unfruitful questions*, how have they rent the churches, wasted time and energy, and taken Christians off from their main business! Would it not have been better if the questions agitated among the people of God of late had been such as these: "How shall a man distinguish the special from the common operations of the Spirit? How may a soul discern its first backslidings from God? How may a backsliding Christian recover his first love? How may the heart be preserved from unseasonable thoughts in duty? How may a bosom-sin be discovered and mortified?" etc. Would not this course have tended more to the honor of true religion and the comfort of souls? I am ashamed that the professors of this generation are yet insensible of their folly. O that God would turn their *disputes* and *contentions*, into *practical godliness*!

Second. **Worldly cares and encumbrances have greatly increased the neglect of our hearts.** The heads and hearts of multitudes have been filled with such a crowd and noise of worldly business, that they have lamentably declined in their zeal, their love, their delight in God, and their heavenly, serious, and profitable way of conversing with men. How miserably have we entangled ourselves in this wilderness of trifles! Our discourses, our conferences, no, our very prayers are tinged with it! We have had so much to do without, that we have been able to do but little within. And how many precious opportunities have we thus lost? How many admonitions of the Spirit have passed over unfruitfully? How often has the Lord called to us, when our worldly thoughts have prevented us from hearing? But there certainly is a way to enjoy God even in our worldly employments. If we lose our views of him when engaged in our temporal affairs, the fault is our own. Alas! that Christians should stand at the door of eternity, having more soul-work upon their hands than their time is sufficient for—and yet be filling their heads and hearts with trifles!

**I infer, lastly, for the awakening of all, that if the keeping of the heart be the great work of a Christian, then there are but few real Christians in the world.** If everyone who has learned the dialect of Christianity, and who can talk like a saint; if everyone who has gifts and abilities, and who can preach, pray, or discourse like a Christian; in a word, if all such as associate with the people of God and partake of ordinances may pass for Christians—then indeed the number is great! But alas! how few can be found, if you judge them by this rule—how few are there who conscientiously keep their *hearts*, watch their *thoughts* and look scrupulously to their *motives*! Indeed there are few *closet-men* among professors. It is easier for men to be reconciled to any other duties in religion than to these. The profane part of the world will not so much as meddle with the outside of any pious duties, and least of all with these; and as to the hypocrite, though he may be very particular in externals—you can never persuade him to undertake this inward, this difficult work; this work, to which there is no inducement from human applause; this work, which would quickly unveil what the hypocrite cares not to know. So that by general consent, this heart-work is only done by a few pious ones—and I tremble to think how few!

If the keeping of the heart be so important a business; if such great advantages result from it; if so many valuable interests are wrapped up in it—then let me call upon the people of God everywhere to engage heartily in this work! O study your hearts, watch your hearts, keep your hearts! Away with fruitless controversies and all idle questions; away with empty names and vain shows; away with unprofitable

discourse and bold censures of others—and turn in upon yourselves! O that this day, this hour, you would resolve upon doing so!

Reader, methinks I shall prevail with you. All that I beg for is this, that you would step aside oftener to talk with God and your own heart; that you would not allow every trifle to divert you; that you would keep a more true and faithful account of your thoughts and affections; that you would seriously demand of your own heart at least every evening—'O my heart, where have you been today, and what has engaged your thoughts?'

# Ten MOTIVES for keeping the heart.

If all that has been said by way of inducement is not enough, I have **ten MOTIVES for keeping the heart** to offer you:

**1. The studying, observing, and diligently keeping your own heart, will surprisingly help you to UNDERSTAND the deep mysteries of religion.** An honest, well experienced *heart* is an excellent help to the *head*. Such a heart will serve for a commentary on a great part of the Scriptures. By means of such a heart you will have a better understanding of divine things than the most learned, but graceless man ever had, or can have. You will not only have a clearer—but a more interesting and profitable apprehension of them. A man may discourse orthodoxly and profoundly of the nature and effects of faith, the troubles and comforts of conscience, and the sweetness of communion with God—who has never felt the efficacy and sweet impression of these things upon his own soul. But how dark and dry are his notions, compared with those of an experienced Christian!

**2. The study and observation of your own heart will powerfully secure you against the dangerous and infecting ERRORS of the times in which you live.** What is the reason why so many professors have departed from the faith, giving heed to fables? Why have so many been led away by the error of the wicked? Why have those who have sown corrupt doctrines had such plentiful harvests among us—but because they have met with a race of professors who never knew what belongs to practical godliness, and the study and keeping of their hearts?

**3. Your care and diligence in keeping your heart will prove one of the best evidences of your SINCERITY.** I know no external act of religion, which truly distinguishes the sound from the unsound professor. It is astonishing how far hypocrites go in all external duties; how plausibly they can order the outward man, hiding all their indecencies from the observation of the world! But they take no heed to their hearts. They are not in secret what they appear to be in public! And before this test no hypocrite can stand. They may, indeed, in a fit of terror, or on a death-bed, cry out of the wickedness of their hearts; but such *extorted complaints* are wholly of no regard. No credit, in law, is to be given to the testimony of one upon the rack, because it may be supposed that the extremity of his torture will make him say anything to get relief. But if self-jealousy, care and watchfulness are the daily workings and frames of your heart—you have great evidence of your sincerity.

**4. How comfortable and how profitable would all ORDINANCES and duties be to you, if your heart was faithfully kept.** What lively communion might you have with God every time you approach him, if your heart was in a right frame! You might then say with David, "My meditation of Him shall be sweet." It is the indisposition of the heart which renders ordinances, and secret duties—so comfortless to some. They strive to raise their hearts to God, now pressing this argument upon them, then that, to quicken and affect them. Yet they often get nearly through the exercise before their hearts begins to be interested in it; and some times they go away no better than they came! But the Christian whose heart is prepared by being constantly kept, enters immediately and heartily into his duties; he outstrips his sluggish neighbor, gets the first sight of Christ in a sermon; the first love-token from Christ in an ordinance; the first communication of grace and love in secret



prayer. Now if there is anything valuable and comfortable in ordinances and private duties—look to your heart and keep it, I beseech you.

**5. An acquaintance with your own heart will furnish you a fountain of matter in PRAYER.** The man who is diligent in heart-work, will lie richly supplied with matter in his addresses to God. He will not be confused for lack of thoughts; his tongue will not falter for lack of expressions.

**6. The most desirable thing in the world, that is, the REVIVAL of religion among a people, may be effected by means of what I am urging upon you.** O that I might see the time when professors shall not walk in a vain show; when they shall please themselves no more with a name to live, while they are spiritually dead; when they shall be no more a company of frothy, vain people; but when holiness shall shine in their lives, and awe the world, and command respect from all who are around them; when they shall warm the heart of those who come near them, and cause it to be said, "God is truly among these men!" And may such a time be expected? Until heart-work becomes the business of professors, I have no hope of seeing a thing so blessed! Does it not grieve you to see how religion is condemned and trampled under foot, and the professors of it ridiculed and scorned in the world? Professors, would you recover your credit? Would you obtain an honorable testimony in the consciences of your very enemies? Then keep your hearts!

**7. By diligence in keeping our hearts we should prevent the occasions of fatal scandals and STUMBLING-BLOCKS to the world.** Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks!

**8. Keep your heart faithfully, and you will be PREPARED for any situation or service to which you may be called.** This, and this alone, call properly fit you for usefulness in any station; but with this you can endure prosperity or adversity; you can deny yourself, and turn your hand to any work. Thus Paul turned every circumstance to good account, and made himself so eminently useful. When he preached to others, he provided against being cast away himself—because he kept his heart! Everything in which he excelled seems to have had a close connection with his diligence in keeping his heart.

**9. If the people of God would diligently keep their hearts, their COMMUNION with each other would be unspeakably more inviting and profitable.** Then "how goodly would be your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles, O Israel!" It is the fellowship which the people of God have with the Father and with the Son—which kindles the desires of others to have communion with them! I tell you, that if saints would be persuaded to spend more time and take more pains about their hearts, there would soon be such a divine excellence in their lives, that others would account it a great privilege to be with or near them.

It is the pride, passion and earthliness of our hearts—which has spoiled Christian fellowship. Why is it that when Christians meet they are often jarring and contending—but because their passions are unmortified? Whence come their uncharitable censures of their brethren—but from their ignorance of themselves? Why are they so rigid and unfeeling toward those who have fallen—but because they do not feel their own weakness and liability to temptation? Why is their discourse so light and unprofitable when they meet—but because their hearts are earthly and vain? But now, if Christians would study their hearts more and keep them better, the beauty and glory of communion would be restored. They would divide no more, contend no more, censure rashly no more. They will feel right one toward *another*—when each is daily humbled under a sense of the evil of his *own* heart!

**10. Lastly—Keep your heart, and then the COMFORTS of the Spirit and the influence of all ordinances will be more fixed and lasting than they now are.** Do the consolations of God seem small to you? Ah, you have reason to be ashamed that the ordinances of God, as to their quickening and comforting effects, should make so light and transient an impression on your heart!

Now, reader, consider well these **special benefits of keeping the heart** which I have mentioned. Examine their importance. Are they small matters? Is it a small matter to have your understanding assisted? Is it a small matter to have your endangered soul rendered safe? Is it a small matter to have your sincerity proved? Is it a small matter to have your communion with God sweetened? Is it a small matter to have your heart filled with matter for prayer? Is it a small thing to have the power of godliness? Is it a small matter to have fatal scandals removed? Is it a small matter to obtain a great fitness to serve Christ? Is it a small matter to have the communion of saints restored to its primitive glory? Is it a small matter to have the influence of ordinances abiding in the souls of saints? If these are no common blessings, no ordinary benefits, then surely it is a great and indispensable duty to keep the heart with all diligence.

And now are you inclined to undertake the business of keeping your heart? Are you resolved upon it? I charge you, then, to engage in it earnestly! Away with every cowardly feeling, and make up your mind to encounter difficulties. Draw your armor from the word of God. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in its commands, its promises, its threatenings. Let the word of Christ be fixed in your understanding, your memory, your conscience, your affections. You must learn to wield the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God) familiarly, if you would defend your heart and conquer your enemies. You must call yourself frequently to an account. Examine yourself as in the presence of the all seeing God. Bring your conscience, as it were, to the bar of judgment. Beware how you plunge yourself into a multiplicity of worldly business—how you practice upon the maxims of the world—and how you venture to indulge your depraved propensities. You must exercise the utmost vigilance to discover and check the first symptoms of departure from God, the least decline of spirituality, or the least indisposition to private meditation, and holy conversation and fellowship with others. These things you must undertake, in the strength of Christ, with invincible resolution at the outset.

And if you thus engage in this great work, be assured you shall not spend your strength for nothing! Comforts which you never felt or thought of, will flow in upon you from every side. The diligent prosecution of this work will constantly afford you the most powerful excitements to vigilance and ardor in the life of faith, while it increases our strength and wears out your enemies. And when you have kept your heart with all diligence a little while—when you have fought the battles of this spiritual warfare, gained the ascendancy over the corruptions within, and vanquished the enemies without—then God will open the gate of heaven to you, and give you the portion which is promised to those who overcome! Awake then, this moment; get the world under your feet, pant not for the things which a man may have, and eternally lose his soul! Bless God that you may have his *service* here, and the *glory* hereafter which he appoints to his chosen.

"Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus—the great Shepherd of the sheep—with the blood of the everlasting covenant, equip you with all that is good to do His will, working in us what is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. Brothers, **I urge you to receive this word of exhortation**, for I have written to you in few words." Hebrews 13:20-22

